This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

+ *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.

+ *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.

+ *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.

+ *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

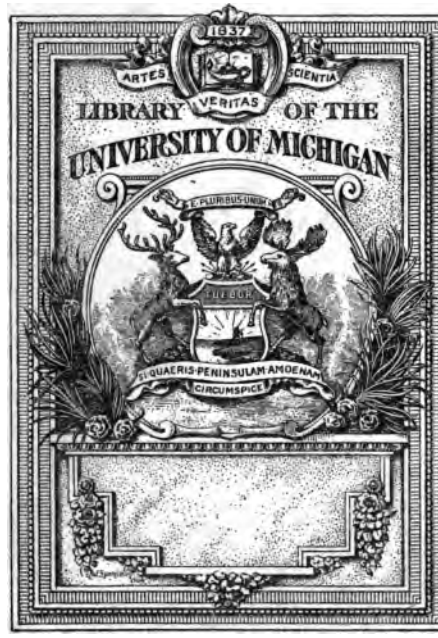
About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at `http://books.google.com/`

H398tr

A 399334

16


1837
ARTES
VERITAS
SCIENTIA
LIBRARY OF THE
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN
E PLURIBUS UNUM
SI QUAERIS PENINSULAM AMOENAM
CIRCUMSPICE

828
H398t

THE

TRIAL OF GIDEON,

AND

COUNTESS ALMARA'S MURDER.

BY

JULIAN HAWTHORNE.

FUNK & WAGNALLS.

NEW YORK:
10 AND 12 DEY STREET.

1886.

LONDON:
44 FLEET STREET.

All Rights Reserved.

Entered, according to Act of Congress, in the year 1886, by
FUNK & WAGNALLS,
In the Office of the Librarian of Congress at Washington, D. C.

THE TRIAL OF GIDEON.

I.

During an excursion to the Levant, some years ago, I separated myself from my party, who were bound for Antioch, and rode northeastward, accompanied only by an Arab and a pack-mule. My nominal destination was Mt. Ararat and the shores of the Caspian; but I really wished to explore, in a sentimental mood, and so far as possible alone, the upper portion of the old Mesopotamian region. My Arab, though he acted as dragoman, knew as little about the geography of the country as I did, and nothing whatever about its history. This, however, did not disturb me. I wished to discover, and to enjoy my impressions. I had a smattering of two or three Oriental languages; the cradle of the human race was before me, and, if Achmed knew nothing, he was a reasonably tractable rascal, and could do what he was told.

A journey of some days brought us to the banks of the Euphrates, which we followed up-stream, and soon came in sight of the snow-crowned heights of the Taurus range of mountains. The country hereabouts was extraordinarily picturesque. The valley is very fertile, and its rich luxuriance contrasts with the stern and remote sublimity of the lofty acclivities. The atmosphere at that season of the year—it was early spring—was warm

and inspiriting, with a luxurious quality in it that soothed the mind, and made the life of the senses delicious. And the consciousness that I was treading in the footsteps of the most primitive civilization enhanced the natural charm. The country was now nearly destitute of fixed inhabitants, and might have seemed virgin ; but how many of the splendid nations of a forgotten antiquity had known it as the scene of their wars, their triumphs, their prosperity, and their ruin !

One rosy afternoon, just before sunset, we passed a bend of the river, and suddenly entered a remarkable valley. The left bank of the river had apparently subsided, at some far-distant epoch, and the waters, overflowing, had formed a shallow lake, five or six miles in circumference. The westward margins of the lake were low, and bordered with thick vegetation, and thence lapsed away in subdued undulations. But on the right bank the topography was conspicuously different. The land here rose steeply almost from the brink of the broad stream ; and, after forming a broad and rugged shelf some two hundred feet above our level, ascended higher after the manner of a stupendous and irregular flight of natural steps, growing ever more and more naked and verdureless, until at length only the living rock remained, its crevices marked here and there by growths of hardy bushes ; and high over all were snow-crowned peaks, now tinted with rose-color by the upward rays of the sun, which had already left us in shadow. The river made a curve below of perhaps half a mile diameter, and the acclivity lifted itself above it in the form of a Titanic amphitheatre. Here might the angels of Milton have sat to witness the drama of mankind.

I bade Achmed unload the mule, and we encamped beside the river. As the twilight increased, the crescent

of the moon defined itself low down toward the south, looking (as it frequently does in these countries) only a few miles distant. Its light gleamed on the calm surface of the stream, and threw gigantic shadows down the huge terraces of the mountain. In all my wanderings, methought I had never beheld a grander spectacle. The sky, profound and transparent, seemed to hold the stars midway in its depth. The lake extended black and inscrutable beneath, and there was silence everywhere, save for the minor note of the frogs and the occasional lonely cry of a water-bird among the sedges of the margin. Deserted though the region appeared, however, I was unable to rid myself of the impression that I was looking upon what had been the theatre of some mighty episode of forgotten history. Indeed, the imagination might safely be left to its own devices in such a spot; it could hardly transcend the possible fact. I strolled down to a small knoll, at the point where the waters of the river flowed in to form the lake, and sat down there upon a fragment of rock. By and by the moon disappeared behind a spur of the mountain; but, as I gazed into the bosom of the lake, I saw a bright reflection there; and looking upward, I perceived, nearly in the zenith, an exceedingly brilliant star, the name of which I was not astronomer enough to determine. Be it what it might, it was the most conspicuous object in the heavens, and seemed to dominate the valley—so large was it, and so softly lustrous. I could almost fancy that I was sensible of a peculiar influence from it, as if it shone especially for the place in which I was. No doubt an astrologer might have discovered grounds for humoring this idea. If men have their particular stars, why not also certain defined regions of the earth's surface?

Smiling at my own fantasies, I arose from my rocky

seat and descended to the little strand against which the noiseless current lapped. The reflection of the stars, striking across the surface, fell upon a small rounded object at my feet. I picked it up, and found it to be a fragment of brick-like substance, of a yellowish-brown hue, and with an appearance of erosion on one of its flat surfaces. A closer examination, however, revealed the fact that what had appeared to be natural markings were in truth artificial, and that I held in my hand one of those records stamped in terra-cotta (or some similar material), numerous specimens of which are found among the ruins of Babylon and other immemorial cities. The character appeared to be a primitive form of Hebraic writing; but it had become too much defaced to be easily legible. I could decipher only a single word, apparently the name of a city, which may be rendered in English by "Nebo." I was aware that one or more places bearing a similar title had formerly existed in Palestine, but I had never heard of a Nebo so far east. History, however, really knows comparatively little about this region. It does not present difficulties enough to tempt the more adventurous class of explorers, and it is out of the line of Cook's tourists and their like. As for the wandering, half-savage tribes of Kurds who range through these solitudes, they neither know nor care anything about the past. Imagination might rebuild a city almost anywhere hereabouts without infringing upon the rights of the most exacting geographer.

I took my brick back with me to the tent, intending to investigate it further by candle-light; but it yielded nothing further, and, indeed, I could scarcely recover, by this artificial illumination, even so much as had showed itself under the rays of the great star—which may, perhaps, have lent an imaginary distinctness to my

interpretation. But I had seen enough to awaken my curiosity, and I went to sleep resolved to make further explorations the next day.

On awaking in the morning I was conscious of having had a very vivid dream, but I could not recall a single incident of it. This forgetfulness annoyed me, because I had a vague notion that what I had dreamt was in some way connected with this locality. I picked up my brick, but the broad glare of daylight put the inscription quite out of countenance; I could make out nothing but a confused puzzle of scratches. After all, the lost city of Nebo might be only a creation of star-light, and no more substantial than my dream. While Achmed was getting something ready for breakfast, I walked about to breathe the delicious air, and get a day-time impression of the place. Certainly, nothing could surpass the solemn splendor of the landscape, and I marvel that painters have never bestirred themselves to bring us records of it. The mountain, towering up above the lake, flung its vast shadow across it, but the sunshine glistened here and there on the snow of its sublime pinnacles, and softened the silvery blue of its crevasses. Below, the broad river slept round its gigantic curve, and a gentle movement of the waters thrilled across the silent mirror of the lake. The rocky amphitheatre suggested the forms of stupendous castles, which fancy easily peopled with fitting inhabitants. But it was the lake that most deeply stimulated speculation. If, as I was inclined to think, it had been created at a comparatively recent epoch, what wonders might not lie beneath its surface! The sunken city of Atlantis might not have more marvels to reveal.

On the bank of the river, not far from our camp, there was a rocky projection overgrown with vegetation,

and extending some distance into the stream. I went down to it, and presently perceived that it was the same knoll that I had visited the evening before. Here and there amid the herbage the substance of the rock peeped forth; and on scraping aside some turf with my foot I saw two narrow fissures meeting at right angles, as if defining the square corner of an artificially dressed stone. Further research satisfied me that the knoll was, in fact, the remnant or foundation of some structure built by human hands. The stones were of immense size, recalling those of the platform of the temple of Baalbec; but their shape differed from the latter; their depth was more nearly equal to their breadth. They had evidently been designed for another sort of building. I at first thought of a tower by the water's edge, after the fashion of the mediæval architects of Europe; but, upon reflection, the site seemed unsuitable for such an erection; nor was I disposed to believe that the ancient inhabitants of Mesopotamia were in the habit of making edifices of that description. But, as I stood there, I glanced across the stream, and perceived on the opposite bank a projection similar to that upon which I was stationed, and then, all at once, the solution of the enigma flashed upon me. These were the two abutments of a huge bridge which had formerly spanned the river.

A bridge of such dimensions was not merely a great engineering achievement, but its existence implied a vast and wealthy population to make use of it. The lost city of Nebo must have been not the least among the mighty centres of human life and industry in the past. But where had the city stood? The bridge should have been easily accessible from all parts of it; yet there was no place now available for such a city to occupy. No place, except the bed of the lake; and this

fact confirmed my half-defined surmise that the overflow of the river had submerged not merely a few square miles of uninhabited pasture, but the homes and lives of swarming thousands of people. The houses—built for the most part, probably, of perishable material—had been dissolved by the waters in the course of ages; but the relics of the great stone bridge still survived, since nothing less than an earthquake could destroy them. This, at least, was my theory of the matter, and it had the advantage over theories in general that there was no one to contradict it.

There was, however, another difficulty. Admitting that there had been a city to build the bridge, what purpose had the bridge served? What did it lead to? Manifestly to the mountain. But why should it have been necessary to go to the mountain? Perhaps, I thought, the mountain may have been used as a quarry for some kind of marble; or, possibly, it contained veins of ore. The great terraces may have been made by excavations. I had never heard of the existence of mineral wealth in the country, but there might have been a supply which was exhausted long ago. At all events, the mountain might be explored, whereas the lake baffled investigation with any means at my command; and to the mountain, therefore, I determined to betake myself.

In the course of a few hours Achmed and I bound together a sufficient number of logs of wood to form a raft capable of supporting our weight; and it required little trouble to fashion a rude oar and a steering apparatus. Thus equipped we launched out upon the stream, the current of which was very gentle, and in less than twenty minutes we landed on the opposite bank not more than two hundred yards below our starting-point. Leav-

ing Achmed in charge of the raft, I pursued my researches alone.

My first care was to visit the rocky knoll which I had supposed to be the other pier of the bridge, and what I saw gave me no reason to doubt the correctness of my inference. Here were the same kind of solid blocks, laid upon one another apparently without cement, but fitting so accurately that they might easily have been mistaken for a homogeneous mass. The foundations had evidently been sunk far below the level of the river, and the superincumbent pile must have been very lofty; indeed, I was inclined to think that the bridge had been of the suspension variety. Looking back across the stream, I tried to fancy the great city, with its temples and towers and hanging gardens, filling the broad area where now gleamed the quiet lake, and all brilliant with awnings and gilded minarets and waving banners, and the murmur and movement of the crowds that thronged its stately streets. Who were they, and what had been their life? No memory of them remained. The still waters told only of the cloudless sky above them, and the trees and shrubbery that stretched beyond were filled only with the mindless activity of bird and beast and insect. It was hard to realize such a transformation.

I turned again and faced the mountain, the summit of which was now concealed by the nearer acclivities. The terraces were much larger than I had supposed, and no regularity of contour was perceptible; they were mere mountainous ledges, with rough boulders piled confusedly upon them—some thrown together in such a way as to make overarching caverns. Clambering upward I at length arrived at a broad level space, at a great height above the river, and commanding an immense prospect,

though still below the proper base of the mountain. Here, for the first time, I discovered traces of what might have been human habitations. The surface of rock on which I trod had almost the evenness of a platform, and here and there were remnants of courses of stone that had been raised upon it. And yet, so much had nature done, even in that dry atmosphere, to win back to herself these relics of man's handiwork, that I was often on the point of dismissing my suppositions as merely fanciful. The immensity of the scale on which everything was planned was also discouraging to a belief in its human origin. In spite of all such misgivings, however, I was unable to put aside my inward and, as it were, intuitive conviction that, in some long-past chapter of the world's history, a portion of the race to which I belonged had lived and aspired, grieved and rejoiced, in this spot. Doubtless I could produce little or no technical evidence in support of my position ; but I have observed, as regards the emotion called faith, that though it may readily be confirmed by arguments, it can never be overturned by them, or even by their absence.

Pacing along near the brink of this plateau—which, as I have already observed, had a vast concave sweep—I arrived at a pyramidal elevation situated at the centre of the arc. It could not have been less than two hundred feet in height, and was originally a four-cornered figure with sides inclining regularly to an apex ; but it had been greatly shattered and battered, and the space between it and the wall of the cliff behind was filled up with a heap of rocky fragments that had fallen from above. It was overgrown with thick bushes, and a nearer scrutiny showed that it was not a built-up structure, but was either an accidental natural formation

(which was next to incredible) or—what was almost as hard to believe—had been actually quarried out of the living rock. Not without many a slip and stumble I forced my way to the summit, and sat down there to recover my breath. From this point the whole scene assumed a new aspect and meaning. I was at the architectural centre of the whole; directly beneath me had been the bridge; and the lake, with its immediate surroundings, indicated the limits of the city. The lines of the great amphitheatre defined themselves symmetrically, and formed, as it were, the auditorium of which the city was the stage. But who had occupied the auditorium? and of what drama had they watched the development? The problem stimulated my curiosity very strongly. Could it be that this concave mountain-side had been consecrated to some kind of religious observances—a city of temples and sacred edifices occupied by priests and magi, and invested by the popular belief with supernatural accessories?

To aid my meditations I resolved to smoke; and, while hunting in my pockets for my pipe, I came upon a hard object which proved to be the bit of inscribed brick which I had picked up the previous evening. While I was examining it anew it slipped from my fingers and rolled down the slope. I sprang after it, and succeeded in keeping my eyes upon it long enough to mark where it lodged in a cavity of the rock. Taking advantage of the inequalities of the surface and of protruding bushes, I reached the cavity without accident. It was a triangular hole, entering the face of the pyramid vertically, and its dimensions were not more than a foot each way. Had I not been guided to it by the rolling brick I might have hunted a week for it in vain. Thrusting my hand into it, I felt about for the fugitive fragment, and in so doing

felt a surface with which my hand came in contact yield beneath the pressure. Something slid backward and sideways, like an opening door, disclosing an inner cavity in which rested a small oblong box of metal which I drew forth.

II.

THE box was about eight inches in length, and five in depth and breadth. It seemed to be made of bronze, though of a quality different from that now known, being almost black in color, and with no traces of that greenish rust which encrusts such specimens of that amalgam as have been exposed to the action of time or the elements. It was an exquisite piece of workmanship, though extremely simple in design and ornamentation. Upon the top of the lid were inlaid in lines of fine gold the letters of some words which I was unable, at that time, to read, but which, as I afterward learned, may be paraphrased as "The Test [or Trial] of Gideon." The edges of the box were enriched by a wavy and involved pattern, recalling both Egyptian and Persian designs, also of gold. Upon the face of the little casket was a monogram, or complex of interlaced figures, in relief, the general outline of the whole being elliptical, and the longest axis of the ellipse parallel with the vertical lines of the box.

The box was closed, but there were no signs either of hinges or of a lock; nor could I even discern the junction line of the cover with the body. It was not very heavy—it may have weighed ten or twelve pounds—and emitted no sound on being shaken. I was very reluctant to break it open, and yet there seemed to be no other way of getting at its contents, which, all things considered, bade fair to be of exceeding interest. For I could not doubt that the box was of an antiquity coeval

with that of the vanished city and of the ruined pyramid; and the place and manner of its concealment indicated a purpose to preserve it with the utmost care. The triangular aperture had, in all probability, been originally closed by a stone fitting accurately into it; but this, whether removed by accident or by the hand of man, had not led to the discovery of the inner receptacle, which accident had disclosed to me.

Holding the box in my hands, and musing abstractedly over these things, my fingers busied themselves unconsciously with following the interlacements of the raised monogram on the front; but presently it seemed to me that this was no longer in the same position that it had at first occupied. Looking at it, I saw that the axis of the ellipse was, in fact, now inclined slightly from right to left, instead of being vertical as before. I pushed it further in this direction, until it assumed a horizontal position, when, to my surprise and pleasure, the lid started open, owing to the releasement of a concealed spring, and the contents of the box were revealed.

They consisted chiefly of a roll of some fine fibrous material, probably a species of papyrus, deposited securely in a lining of woven tissue of gold, so delicate and soft as almost to have the feeling of satin. The inside of the lid was a plate of gold, in which were inlaid three lines of cabalistic figures in jewels, the latter being cut down so as to form one surface with their background. The papyrus was a scroll six inches wide and several feet in length, written over with a clear and beautiful character, in a glossy black pigment, with occasional lines and ornamentations in blue and scarlet. A slight inspection showed me that the language employed, though allied to the early Hebrew, was in a dialect with which I was unfamiliar, and which (separated as I was

from all books of reference and consultation) I could not then hope to interpret. Here and there a word or a passage seemed to emerge doubtfully from the prevailing obscurity, like a whisper in the silence of night to one who lies half awake; but though these stimulated my interest, they could not even partially satisfy it. After much vain studying I was finally compelled to give up my attempts for the time being, and until I reached some place where I could avail myself of better scholarship than was at my individual command. Accordingly, I replaced the scroll in its place, closed the box, and wrapped it up in my handkerchief, lest it should tempt the curiosity or cupidity of my worthy Achmed. . . . Three months later I came up the Red Sea, and crossing the Isthmus, proceeded by steamer along the Mediterranean to Marseilles. Arriving at Paris, I spent the winter and spring there and in London, at the libraries of the Bibliothèque Nationale and the British Museum; and by the aid of the resources there afforded me, I succeeded in reading the whole of the strange story of the Trial of Gideon. It is an ancient story, and yet, perhaps —so great is the essential resemblance of mankind to himself, from age to age—its significance may have some pertinence to us of to-day. I have not, however, attempted a literal or complete translation, but have merely given such features and passages of the narrative as seemed most likely to appeal to the sympathies of modern readers.

III.

In the days of Zur, the king, the greatest of the kings of earth, whose dwelling was in the mighty city Nebo, which is upon the River Euphrates, great prosperity and happiness came upon all the people. They worshipped the bright star called Om, because therein is the abode of the Holy One, from whom are all things that exist. Now the star Om is most bright at that time of the year when it looks down from the zenith upon the high mountain which is over against the city Nebo; and therefore, also, the favor of the Holy One was upon Nebo, and upon Zur the king, more than upon aught else that is in the earth. And at evening, when the star Om lifted itself above the face of the earth, Zur the king knelt down and did homage, and all the people with him, that the favor of the Holy One might remain upon the city Nebo, which is upon the Euphrates, beneath the high mountain. And upon that day of the year when Om looks down from the zenith upon the mountain, upon that day was a mighty festival in Nebo, and all the people rejoiced and worshipped, and offered sacrifices; and the wise men and the prophets, whose dwelling was upon the mountain-side, which is curved like the rim of the moon when she is young, celebrated the mysteries of the Holy One, which are called the mysteries of Om. Now, concerning these mysteries more will be related in what is to follow.

For there was a saying in the land, "Great is Zur the king; but the prophets of the mountain are greater than

he." For the spirit of the Holy One descended upon the mountain in the rays of the bright star Om, and the ground of the rock was sacred, and the figures of the prophets were sometimes invisible, like the breeze that is perceived and yet not seen ; and sometimes they shone with a fair white light, like the light of stars falling upon white raiment. And the prophets shared not in the wealth of the city Nebo ; yet their riches exceeded those of the king. Their dwellings were not in palaces, but in the face of the rock, and in tents ; and their clothing was neither of spun wool, nor of fine linen, nor did they wear any gold or jewels ; but their heads were bare, and the skin of the deer was upon their loins. Yet were they robed in light and in power, and the fire of love dwelt in their eyes. And the prayers which the king and his people offered up to the Holy One, the same did the prophets bring to Him ; and He received them, and was gracious to the king and the people for the prophets' sake, and prosperity and happiness came upon them.

But as touching the mysteries which were celebrated at the culmination of the star Om, the case was this : In the midst of the face of the mountain where the prophets dwelt, and which is curved like the rims of the new moon, even there was hewn out a pyramid, having four sides, and of the height of one hundred and fifty cubits. And the name of the pyramid was called the altar of Om. Now, at the culmination of that star, the light thereof cast no shadow from the pyramid, but shined equally upon each of the four sides. And on the day preceding the night of the culmination, a youth was chosen from among the people of the city. He brought with him an offering, which was the fruit of his life and the joy of his soul ; he had wrought it in secret, with

prayer and fasting, and it was the best thing that his heart could conceive, and his thought shape, and his hands fashion. And none had seen the offering, or known what manner of thing it was, until the day before the culmination. On that day the youth purified himself, and put on white raiment of fine linen, and anointed his head and his hands, and took his offering, whether it were a carving, or a figure wrought of marble, or a painting upon ivory or upon the skin of a heifer smoothed and made clean, or a writing upon the leaf of the papyrus; and he walked to the bridge that hung above the River Euphrates, the same that was builded in the old time by the power of the prophets, of stones exceeding great, uplifted as towers; and the middle part made strong with ropes of brass drawn out from the summit of the towers across the river. But when the youth was come to the hither side of the bridge, the multitude that had followed him with shouts, and with the music of harps and cymbals, stayed and went no farther. But the youth, having put off the shoes from his feet, and holding the offering in his hands, walked on over the bridge, until he came to the other side of the river. There the high-priest of the prophets met him, and bade him welcome, and led him up the side of the mountain, until he came to the foot of the pyramid, which was called the altar of Om. There the youth gave up his offering into the hands of the high-priest, and knelt down before the altar.

But the high-priest, having taken the offering, bore it to a secret place, where search was made whether it were worthy or unworthy. But if it were held to be unworthy, still judgment was not passed upon it, because one only may judge, that is, the Holy One, whose dwelling is in Om. So, when the evening was come,

and the bright star drew near its culmination, the high-priest and the prophets assembled together, and took the offering, and carried it from the secret place even to the top of the altar, and set it down there. And the youth remained kneeling in front of the altar, nor might he arise thence, until the omen was fulfilled.

Now, when the star Om reached its culmination, its rays fell upon the summit of the altar, nor did they cast any shadow from the altar, but lighted each of the four sides equally. And the rays fell upon the offering that was laid upon the summit of the altar. And if the offering was worthy, then the rays shone upon it with an exceeding great glory, as if the star itself rested there; but if it was unworthy, then was the offering consumed and burnt up, and from the ashes thereof a black smoke arose, and spread a cloud between the star and the altar. Such were the omens. And if the omen were good, the people who waited in the city, at the other side of the bridge, uplifted their voices and rejoiced; and if the omen were evil, then did the people mourn and hide their faces. For the bright light and the dark smoke were both alike visible to the people from afar off.

Now the law of the omens was this: If the omen were good, then the youth was received into the company of the prophets, and became as one among them; only with this difference, that he might return to the people of the city, and carry to them the good things that the prophets sent, and relate the wisdom which they uttered, and have power to heal diseases, and to minister to the poor and the dying. And by them was maintained a correspondence between them of the holy mountains, and them of the city, which otherwise had not been; for neither might the prophets cross over the bridge to the city, nor could the people of the city (save

only the chosen youth at the time of the culmination) cross to the mountain. But those youths whose offerings were accepted went to and fro as the spirit moved them; and by them was the blessing of the mountain brought upon the city, and the need of the city made known to the mountain. Such, therefore, was the law of the good omen.

But the law of the bad omen was this: If the offering was found unworthy, and, having been placed upon the altar, was consumed, and a black smoke arose from it, then was the youth who had brought the offering put to death; nor was it made known to any man what the manner of his death was; but he vanished from men's sight forever, nor were his ashes found, nor was his name remembered. Such was the law of the bad omen.

Yet inasmuch as to become one of the messengers of the prophets was held a great honor by the people, so that no other was to be compared with it; and, inasmuch, also, as the young men strove one with another, who should be adjudged worthy to offer the offering, even though the penalty of the rejection thereof was death; it so happened that many years passed wherein no evil omen was recorded, and no black smoke arose from the altar, spreading a cloud between the altar and the bright star Om; and the oldest son of the oldest father knew not of the time when the evil omen had come to pass; and the messengers of the prophets multiplied, and the mighty city Nebo prospered greatly, and the dominion of Zur the king was exalted beyond that of all the sovereigns of the earth. And the bridge that was hung by ropes of brass between the two high towers that stood upon the banks of the River Euphrates, was trodden daily by the feet of the messengers—they whose offerings had been accepted on the altar, bringing peace and good

tidings and honor and mercy from the sacred mountain to the city. Verily, the blessing of the Holy One was upon them.

But after many days a change came over the people of Nebo. For the King Zur had a son, his best-beloved, who was to rule the kingdom after his father slept with his fathers; and the son of the king was wise of his years, and learned in enchantments, and he could raise spirits, and work wonders that are not lawful in the earth which the Holy One has made; and his person was exceeding comely, and his face was fair to look upon, so that all men bowed down before him, saying, "Hail to the son of the king!" And the heart of the king's son was puffed up with pride, and he said: "Behold, I will prepare an offering, even an offering for the altar of Om; by my magical arts will I prepare it, and it shall deceive the high-priest of the prophets, and they shall place it upon the altar, and the bright star Om shall shine upon it, and make it to glow like a star before all the city; and I shall become a messenger of the prophets, and shall have power both in heaven and upon the earth, and the glory shall be mine." And as he said, so did he; nor did he fear the black smoke of the evil omen, for he thought in his heart: "I am the son of Zur, the mighty king, and who shall dare to reject my offering?" So he took his offering in his hands, and a great concourse of people followed him, with shouts, and the music of harps and of cymbals, until they were come to the hither side of the bridge. There they stayed, and the king's son went on alone across the bridge; but he put not off the shoes from his feet, for he said: "I am the king's son: who shall gainsay me?"

Now, when he was come to the other side of the bridge, the high-priest met him, and received from his

hands the offering which he had brought. And the high-priest took the offering to the secret place, and there search was made whether it were worthy or unworthy. Now, the offering was beautiful without, and good to look upon ; but, inasmuch as it was made by the arts of enchantment, instead of by prayer and fasting, and was an empty thing of witchcraft, instead of a fruit of the life and a joy of the soul ; for these causes the high-priest and the prophets held that the offering of the king's son was unworthy. Nevertheless, because to the Holy One alone belongs the right of judgment, they bore the offering to the summit of the pyramid, and laid it down there. And lo, the bright star Om arose above the earth, and mounted the heavens, and stood in the zenith, and his rays fell upon the pyramid, even upon all the four sides of it, so that no shadow was cast. And they fell upon the offering of the king's son, and straightway it was consumed, and a black smoke arose from the place of the conflagration and mounted aloft like the stem of a palm-tree, and spread abroad across the heavens, so that the light of the star was cut off from the city. And from the city came a sound of woe and lamentation, and the voice of the King Zur, mightier than the voice of many trumpets, crying aloud : " Give me back my son !"

But the king's son was dead, for his enchantments had no power on the sacred mountain, nor the voice of the king his father. Nor was there any that knew the manner of his death ; but he vanished from man's sight forever, and his ashes were not found, and his name was forgotten ; for such was the law of the evil omen, which is changed for no man.

But Zur the king was very wroth, and he blasphemed the prophets of the sacred mountain, saying, " Accursed

be ye, who have slain my only son, the heir of my kingdom." And he made a law that no messenger of the prophets should cross from the sacred mountain to the city, nor any from the city go over thither; and he said: "Henceforth we will be a law unto ourselves, and it shall be known that we need not the prophets, nor the altar, nor the star Om that shines upon it. Am not I Zur, the king of the earth? and who shall prevail against me?" So from that time none crossed the bridge, and the messengers of the prophets went no more back and forth between the sacred mountain and the city Nebo. Yet the prosperity of the people abated not, but waxed greater than before; for the Holy One hasteth not to be angry, but is merciful for many generations.

And Zur the king said: "Behold, the rays of the star Om shine no more upon the city; but I, Zur, even I will make a light for my people, that shall be brighter than the star Om, and no evil omen shall proceed from it; but whosoever offers an offering, and the light falls upon it, the same shall be numbered among my servants, and a crown of gold shall be given him, and he shall be called the messenger of Zur, the king of the earth." So the king sent men with axes into the forest, and they cut down the tallest trees, and brought them, and fastened them together, the end of one to the end of another, and bound them with bands, and stayed them with cords, and set up the mast which they had made in the court of the king's palace. And it was tall exceedingly, even taller than the towers of the bridge across the River Euphrates, and than the pyramid of rock that is called the altar of Om. And upon the top of the mast the king fixed a great lantern, the light whereof was lighted each year on that day on which the king's son was born, he that perished before the altar of Om. And whoso-

ever of the young men of the city did on that day bring an offering and lay it on the altar in the court of the king's palace, beneath the great mast—having previously given into the hands of the king's treasurer a hundred pieces of gold—the same received a crown and was called a messenger of Zur, the king of the earth. For the treasurer, when he had received the hundred pieces of gold, lighted the lantern at the top of the mast, and the rays thereof descended and rested upon the offering, and shone there with a great brightness; and whether the offering were worthy, or whether it were unworthy, still the rays of the lantern descended, and the youth received his crown, and was applauded of all the people, and the king favored him. But if the youth who placed the offering upon the altar gave not into the hands of the treasurer a hundred pieces of gold, then the treasurer lighted not the lantern, and no rays fell upon the offering, whether it were worthy or whether it were unworthy, and the people mocked and pointed with the finger, and drove the youth forth out of the city with jeers and laughter, and the king turned his face from him. So it came to pass that the hundred pieces of gold were more regarded than the offering, and there was a proverb among the people: "Carve thy statue with a golden chisel, paint thy picture with a golden brush, write thy writing with a golden pen, and say thy prayers with a golden tongue." And the messengers of the king were many, and each one bowed his head to the other when they met, but in their hearts were envy and uncharitableness; and they did no good deeds among the people, as the messengers of the prophets had done in the former time. Nevertheless, for many years, prosperity continued upon the city Nebo and its inhabitants, for the Holy One is patient. . . .

IV.

. . . THERE lived in the city a youth, whose name was Gideon. His father was a goldsmith, and Gideon worked with him, and became a cunning carver of gold and silver. Now Gideon loved a maiden, Melita, lovelier than a flower that opens in the morning; her eyes were dark and soft, like jewels melting, and her breath was as sweet as the perfume of the bud of the Persian rose. But Melita was also beloved by a youth named Maon, the son of the king's equerry. And Maon was prepared against the anniversary of the birth of the king's son, to lay an offering upon the altar beneath the tall mast in the courtyard, so that he might be made a king's messenger. But Gideon had taken gold and silver, and had wrought therefrom the figure of his love, Melita; her head, and her bosom, and her arms, and her feet, he made of gold, and her garments made he of silver, and her dark eyes made he of jewels. And he wrought the figure in secret, so that none saw it, nor did any know of its making. It was the fruit of his life, and the joy of his soul; he had labored with prayer and fasting, and the offering was the best that his heart could conceive, or his thought shape, or his hands fashion. And he said: "This offering will I offer upon the altar of Om, upon the sacred mountain."

But when his friends knew of it, they strove to dissuade him, saying: "Why will you risk your life? Of what avail will it be to you? It is now many years that no one has crossed the bridge to the other side of the

River Euphrates, and all custom of honor has departed from the observance. Even were you admitted to become a messenger of the prophets, the law of the king forbids you to come among us and minister to the people. But the prophets will surely kill you, for the city Nebo and all that proceeds thence is an abomination unto them. Abide you here with us, therefore, and lay your offering upon the altar in the king's courtyard."

His father also reasoned with Gideon, and said: "Am I not older than thou? wilt thou not hearken to me? Have I brought thee up all these years, and given thee instruction, that thou shouldst now abandon me when I am old? What will it advantage thee, though thy offering be found worthy over yonder? the king will not honor thee, and all thy worldly goods will be taken from thee. But abide thou here, and I will give thee a hundred pieces of gold, and the king's treasurer will cause thee to be made one of the king's messengers."

Melita, likewise, she whom Gideon loved, came and entreated him, saying: "Wilt thou bring grief to her that loveth thee? For either thou wilt be put to death, or else the prophets will receive thee, and turn thy heart from me. Carest thou more to be the prophet's messenger than to have me to thy wife? Dost thou think that the star Om knoweth aught of thee, or careth whether thou livest or diest? But lay thy offering beneath the lantern, and give a hundred pieces of gold to the treasurer, and he will know thee, and thou wilt be prosperous, and thou shalt be my husband."

Then answered Gideon: "Now may the Holy One give me strength and wisdom! For the others, I heeded them not; but thou art the core of my heart and the life of my soul. Nevertheless, except I do this thing that I have purposed, I shall lose thee even when I embrace

thee. For love of thee wrought I this offering, but the power to do it, and the power to love thee, were the same. If, therefore, I forsake the purpose for which I wrought it, shall not the power to love thee forsake me also? For all love cometh from the Holy One, who dwells in the bright star Om, and if I turn back from Him, shall I not lose His gift?"

Then said Melita: "Now I know thou lovest me not. Go whither thou wilt, and do what pleaseth thee, but I will cast in my lot with Maon, the son of the king's equerry."

On the day preceding the night of the culmination of the star Om, Gideon arose, and purified himself, and anointed his head, and took his offering in his hands, and set out toward the bridge. But no one followed him to bid him Godspeed, save only his father, who besought him to return; but Gideon would not, for his soul was firm within him. Then his father lifted up his voice and cursed his son, and Gideon went over the bridge and returned not.

Now, when he was come to the other side of the bridge, the high-priest met him, and bade him welcome; and Gideon gave into the hands of the high-priest the offering that he had brought. And while the high-priest took the offering into the secret place, to make search whether or not it were worthy, Gideon knelt down before the foot of the pyramid which is called the altar of Om. And the tears ran down his face, because Melita had forsaken him, and his father had cursed him.

But Maon, who was the rival of Gideon, fearing lest Gideon's offering should prove worthy, and Gideon should return and have Melita to wife, spoke to his father the equerry, saying: "Beseech the king that he suffer us to cut the ropes of brass that are stretched out

from the towers to support the bridge over the waters of the River Euphrates. For my heart misgives me that Melita loves Gideon, and, if he return, she will cast in her lot with him." So the equerry went to the king, and besought him according to what Maon had said ; and the king, remembering the death of his only son, answered : " Be it as ye will." So Maon, having taken others with him, went down to the bridge to cut the ropes of brass. And it was close upon the hour when the star Om reached its culmination. And Gideon, kneeling before the foot of the altar, heard the sound of the cutting of the ropes, and knew the thing that Maon intended ; yet he moved not, nor spoke any word.

Now it so happened that Melita was unhappy, because of the words that she had spoken to Gideon, and sleep came not nigh her, insomuch that she arose from her bed, and came down through the streets of the city to the banks of the River Euphrates. And she heard the sound of the cutting of the ropes of the bridge, and drew near, and saw the thing that Maon intended. Then compassion smote her, because of Gideon, and she cried out : " Stay thy hand, and cut not the ropes, neither suffer the bridge to fall, for my soul loveth Gideon, and him only, and if the Holy One spare his life, I will be his wife, and serve, obey, and cherish him." But Maon answered : " His wife thou shalt not be, and if the high-priest of the altar slay him not, verily he shall die by my hand." And he cut the ropes of the bridge, and the bridge fell, and the great tower that was on the hither bank of the river trembled and gave way, and fell upon the houses of the city Nebo, and crushed them, and a stone fell upon Maon, and drove him into the earth ; and the other tower, on the farther bank, fell also, and the waters of the river swallowed it up. And

the noise of the falling was as the thunder of an earthquake. But Gideon, kneeling before the foot of the altar, heard the sound of the falling of the bridge and of the towers, yet he moved not, nor uttered any word.

Then Melita lifted up her voice and cried: "Oh, Gideon, thou whom my soul loveth, behold I come unto thee!" And she threw herself into the waters of the River Euphrates, and swam toward the sacred mountain, and toward the altar, and toward Gideon. But the waters of the river were in commotion, because of the fall of the bridge, and the ropes of the bridge smote her limbs in the water, so that she grew faint, and cried: "Oh, Gideon, I perish!"

Now the moment of the culmination of the bright star Om was at hand. But Gideon heard the cry of Melita, the core of his heart and the life of his soul. And he remembered not his offering, nor the high-priest, nor the days of his labor, nor the hope of acceptance; but he arose from his knees before the altar, and turned him about, and went swiftly down the side of the mountain, and threw himself into the waters of the River Euphrates, crying with a loud voice: "Melita, I come!" And he swam through the waves of the river, and through the ropes of the bridge, and caught Melita by the waist, and drew her to the shore of the sacred mountain. And, behold, the life had departed out of her. Then Gideon uttered a bitter cry, and cast himself down beside her, and knew no more.

But even as Gideon plunged into the waters of the river, the rays of the bright star Om fell upon the offering that was upon the summit of the altar. And the rays consumed not the offering, but shone upon it with an exceeding great glory, as if the star itself rested there, for the offering was worthy. And the high-

priest and the prophets, going down to the brink of the river, lifted up Melita and Gideon in their arms, and bore them up the mountain. Then the waters of the River Euphrates rose mightily and overflowed the right bank, on which stood the great city Nebo. And the city was overwhelmed, with all who were in it; and Zur the king and all his messengers and his people were drowned in the deep waters, nor did any survive of the population of Nebo. And the waters of the river formed a great lake, which abides there to this day, in token that these things are true.

But the high-priest and the prophets knelt down, and prayed to the Holy One whose dwelling is in Om, and who giveth life to all things that exist. And they prayed: "O thou Holy One, to whom all things are possible, vouchsafe that the soul of Melita enter into the gold and the silver of the image of Melita that Gideon wrought for his offering; that the image may have life, and be to him the Melita whom he has lost, and who is the core of his heart and the life of his soul. That so his love and his faith and his labor may become one, and be made his wife, and he and she may glorify thy name upon the sacred mountain."

And the Holy One inclined His ear to the prayer of the high-priest and the prophets, and did according to their prayer. And the image of Melita that was upon the summit of the altar of Om arose; and the soul of Melita entered into the gold and the silver; and the gold became flesh, and the silver became raiment, and she descended from the altar, and her loveliness was as a flower that opens in the morning, and her eyes were as melting jewels, and her breath as the perfume of the Persian rose-bud. And she went to Gideon, and wound her arms about his neck, and laid his head in her bosom,

and kissed his lips, saying: "Awake, Gideon, thou whom my soul loveth." And Gideon awoke from his swoon, and his eyes beheld her, and he knew that she was Melita.

Such is the narrative of the trial of Gideon.

COUNTESS ALMARA'S MURDER.

A STORY.

I.

TEN years have passed since the Countess's tragic end, and even now I tell the story with great reluctance. Desire that the truth be known is complicated by unwillingness to revive memories so full of gloom and pain. But circumstances have rendered the full revelation almost imperative, and I am resolved to discharge my duty in the matter.

The earliest hint of the event destined to influence so deeply the course of my life was by no means of an apparently ominous nature. On a lovely afternoon in early June, just before the general summer exodus from New York, I was seated (in pursuance of a custom I had established) on a certain bench in a retired nook of the Park. I presume the bench is still there, though it is a long time since I saw it last. It is out of the ordinary route of promenaders, but is so placed as to command a view in more than one direction. Overhead clusters the glancing foliage of a silver poplar—I think that is the name of the tree—a pond is not far off, and near it a plot of grass to which nurses bring children. The spot has almost the seclusion of actual country, though I might hear through the bird-songs, were I to listen in-

tently enough, the jingle of the Eighth Avenue horse-cars.

Country or not, I used to enjoy myself here very well; and the children and the nurses seemed to believe in it, too, and their proceedings afforded me a good deal of entertainment. With a cigarette between my fingers, and an open but unread book on my knee, I have observed them for an hour at a time. They seldom looked back at me, or seemed aware of my existence; but I had become accustomed to see the world pass by and regard me not. I had become, like the man in Shakespeare, a looker-on at life—perhaps not altogether by my own choice. Well, we that are called drones in the human hive have a pathetic time of it. We would like to benefit our race; our ideals are good; our capacities fair; and yet we achieve nothing—leave no mark upon contemporary history. At best, we become critical or appreciative; in lack of a proper life of our own, we supplement the lives of others. A race of Hamlets, but, unlike him, destitute of the opportunity even of tragic failure.

I make the confession now; but a generation ago (when I was just of age) I rated myself a promising young fellow. I was the son of a man of means, had passed with credit through the school and college curriculum, and possessed undoubted talent. My father gave me five thousand a year—a sum which his death, a few years later, quadrupled. What might I not achieve? During the next decade I tried a great many things, but they all came so easily to me that none seemed worthy my serious devotion. I wanted an occupation to tax all my energies; I was too good to be wasted on the every-day work of the world. I rambled over the face of the earth; I dallied with this and trifled

with that; I stored my mind with aimless experience, until, at thirty-five, I awoke one morning to find myself —not famous, but—good for nothing. I don't know why it was so, but that it was so I will do myself the justice to say I never again doubted.

I recount this intensely commonplace bit of autobiography from no motive either of self-pity or self-complacency. I am not proud of it, or even very sorry for it, now. "The trouble with you is," my friend Raleigh used to say, "your independent income. Now *I* hadn't a penny!" Well, I don't know. Possibly I would have done wisely to endow some school or hospital with my property, and start out on my merits, like Raleigh. But since my failure became a settled thing, I have not found the income so much in the way. I rented a comfortable flat in the upper part of the city, joined a good club or two, drove a horse now and then, gave and received quiet little dinners, attended the opera, visited Europe every year or so, and sometimes took the train to Newport or Bar Harbor. I knew a number of clever fellows, and was honored with the friendship of two or three good women, who restrained my bachelorhood from degenerating into cynical barbarism. A confirmed bachelor, however, I doubtless believed myself to be. I had emerged, wifeless, from three love affairs; and, at full forty, there could be little hope for me. And yet, as against the weapons of some women, the crust of forty masculine years is but as wax before the fire.

I shall not, even while I yet might do so, attempt to disguise from the reader the deep attachment which I learned to feel for the Countess Almara. It is true, indeed, that our acquaintance was developed, from the ordinary social recognitions, into serious intimacy, by our joint interest in a terrible calamity; but, plain

though she was of feature, and criticisable of figure, I believe I should have been drawn to her as surely, if less rapidly, had the circumstances been commonplace. Far greater physical defects than hers might have been forgotten for the sake of her charms of mind and manner; nay, they might even become, themselves, the object of a kind of affection.

But I must not, at this stage of my narrative, do more than merely allude to the Countess. Let me repeat here, that my controlling aim in life was to combine a strictly conventional behavior with a reasonable privacy and freedom of thought and action. So wide spreads the gulf between the sanguine youth who courts all eyes and the thin-blooded man who shrinks from his own gaze in the looking-glass. Had I foreseen the tragedy that was about to thrust itself across the even tenor of my way, I fear that neither duty nor friendship would have withheld me from escaping to the ends of the earth —such was my dread of notoriety. It is often well for one's self-respect afterward that the future is impenetrable!

But to return to that June afternoon on the Park bench. I had been seated for perhaps an hour, and was beginning to doze from excess of physical composure, when I was suddenly aware of being earnestly scrutinized by a pair of very bright young eyes. I was broad awake at once, and found myself face to face with one of the loveliest children I ever saw. He was about five years old, with wavy brown hair, a fresh ivory skin, and great violet blue eyes with dark curved lashes. Though not exactly a robust child, he was delicately and gracefully fashioned, and rosy with health and spirits. He was clad in a costume of blue and white, and wore a straw hat on the back of his head. He held in his right hand

a bit of string, to the other end of which was attached a spool. After we had stared gravely and silently at each other for a minute, he came nearer and put the string in my hand, and then ran away. A modest young woman of French demeanor, in a black gown and white cap and apron, who was walking at a little distance, joined herself to him: evidently she was his nurse. Just before they passed out of sight, the child turned round and kissed his little hand to me—a courtesy to which I cordially responded.

Greatly pleased with this adventure, I put the spool in my pocket, and I have kept the souvenir ever since. The next day I visited a toy-shop, and furnished myself with bait for my young friend, should he reappear. Before long I caught sight of him, under the trees at a little distance from our first meeting-place, and the *bonne* sitting with some sewing in her hand. I approached, and talked with them. The child, as well as the nurse, spoke only French. We were soon friends. He was a frank, affectionate, well-mannered boy, endowed with a certain sprightly grace that showed a foreign origin; but from one or two passages between him and Marie, I inferred that he had a hasty temper. His name—the only one he gave me—was Max. At length, in pursuance of an idea that had been in my mind since yesterday, I asked him whether he had ever had his portrait painted. Max shook his head.

I said: "I have a friend who makes pictures of good children, and would make one of you. He is a pleasant fellow and a famous painter, and his name is Raleigh. He lives only a little way off, in a fine large studio. Will you come with me some time and visit him?"

"Je vieux bien!" exclaimed Max, making a jump off the ground.

"Meet me here to-morrow, then—"

But here the *bonne* interposed, with the remark that it would first be necessary to ask "Madame."

To this I acceded, and gave her my card for Madame as a voucher of my respectability. I then shook hands with Max, and we parted with the understanding that I was to be on the look-out for them at three o'clock to-morrow.

I was punctual to the appointment, but neither Max nor his nurse came. After sitting a couple of hours, and smoking more than my customary cigarettes, I gave them up, and betook myself to Raleigh's studio. I was disappointed, and a chat with my old friend was as likely as anything to restore my good humor.

But I can no longer postpone some account of Raleigh and his career.

II.

Though my own history is not, as I was just saying, anything to be proud of, it is at all events useful, as affording a parallel and relief to that of my friend Raleigh. The broad outward aspects of our lives were, while as yet we were young men, in many respects similar, and, occasionally, very much alike; but, of course, there was always that immeasurable inward difference, that made him what he was, and me what I was. We were together at the same school and college; both of us were sanguine, confident, versatile; while, as to ideals, my own were, if anything, loftier than Raleigh's. We both went abroad at an early age, our paths now crossing, now running side by side; we enjoyed more than one memorable adventure in company. And at last, he, like me, came back to our amiable, quick-witted, unprincipled New York, and made bed and lodging there; and, like me, he had never married, and was still a bachelor.

But how little all this signifies! It was not only that Raleigh had no income—it was that he had a bent and genius. He was a born painter; and though his mind was many-sided, yet his various accomplishments did but illustrate his central reason of being—his instinct for color and form. I used to say that Raleigh could not shoe a horse, or kiss a woman, without thereby making himself a better painter. He was a fine instrument of many strings, tuned to one key. In person he was singularly handsome: strong and active, but with an

almost excessive grace of pose and movement, an easy smile and bend of the head, and a fine formation and gesture of the hands. His nose was a delicate aquiline, his eyes blue and long; his golden brown hair grew in hyacinthine curls, which had of late begun to show silvery lights. The expression of his face was changeful, as his nature was complex. On one side he appeared all emotional; but no one could, upon occasion, be more stern and inflexible. Though uniformly in good spirits, he was subject to fits of depression, and he was notably deficient in the sense of humor; and his own attempts at raillery wanted tact—a quality of which, in other relations, he had more than enough. Perhaps he permitted himself jealousies and grudges unworthy a man of his powers; but I have loved him too long and well to set up as his judge.

He was a professed worshipper of the beautiful—indeed, beauty was his religion; he was pagan by nature and cultivation. He loved his work, but rather, methought, as a faun might love his nymph, than as a man would love his wife. Even before he had mastered the technique of his craft, his pictures gained a wide and remunerative popularity; they suited our sophisticated age. Many of his later works evinced undoubted genius; but, to my taste, they were somewhat too refined and soft; they needed a touch of the homely sincerity of fact. They were, however, the genuine product of the man's personality, and they brought him great fame and profit. For subjects, he preferred the human figure, and was especially fond of painting young girls and children.

A man so overflowing with life could hardly be lacking in love-adventures; and, in truth, most women found him charming; and he seemed intuitively to know

and do whatever was most pleasing to them. I could fancy him, two thousand years ago, standing heroic beside an altar crowned with flowers, with a galaxy of virgins bowing before him, and singing hymns to his honor and glory. It was much that way as it was, only with a different scenic display, and a broader delegation of ladies. He accepted the homage graciously, though with a certain reserve; never inclining more to one worshipper than to another. Everything that was courteous, sympathetic, charming, Raleigh would be; but falling in love formed no part of his programme. Why not? Everybody asked that question, no one could answer it.

Perhaps, however, I can throw some light upon the matter, for I happened to be with him at a critical period of his emotional life. We were in Rome together one winter, at the time of the Carnival, and while passing in our carriage up and down the Corso, Raleigh was much impressed by the lovely face of a young girl on a balcony. She evidently belonged to the Roman aristocracy, and I remember well the effect of almost ideal female charm that she produced; she was timid and shy, but manifested a girlish delight in the scene before her. At first, Raleigh was captivated by her artless enthusiasm; but he soon went beyond this stage. As long as the Carnival lasted, he tried, not unsuccessfully, to attract her notice by the ordinary gallantries permitted to the season. It was curious to observe him under the sway of this first serious passion; and, had it resulted happily, it would have made him a better and sounder, if not a more successful man. At length he found means to get presented to the girl's family. I was not similarly honored, for I did not care to encourage my friend in so desperate an enterprise as he had under-

taken. There was, however, I was given to understand, another daughter of the family, for whose hand I might have sued with quite as much worldly chance of success as Raleigh possessed. But I disapproved of the whole idea of such a union, and did my best to dissuade my friend. I might as well have bade the sun stop shining.

"I shall succeed!" he would exclaim, throwing out his arm. "She cares for me already; and I've won over the sister; the sister will help!"

"You'd better be careful," I replied, "that you don't win over the sister so thoroughly that she will want you for herself."

"Not she! she's a good-hearted creature, but marriage is not in her books."

"How are you off for masculine rivals?"

"Rivals!" repeated Raleigh, scornfully. "I have none! there is a little black-wigged, wax-mustached, Italian nobleman, five and a half feet high, dressed like a barber and smelling like a civet-cat; if he is my rival, so be it!"

"My dear fellow," was my sagacious reply, "you have all mediæval and modern Italian history for your rival; not to mention such little drawbacks as your profession and your bank account—"

"My profession!" interrupted Raleigh, with an indignant laugh; "where would Italy be, I'd like to know, if it wasn't for Art! As for money, let her marry me, and I'll become as rich as Barberini!"

"You had better come back to Paris with me, next week," said I, opening my cigarette-case with a sigh.

"When I come to Paris," returned Raleigh, firmly, "it shall be with my wife on my arm. And if you're going to smoke, I wish you'd do it somewhere else. I don't like it."

"Think over my advice, however," were my parting words.

Of course I knew he would do no such thing; and to tell the truth, I secretly believed he might succeed after all. With the young lady herself there would doubtless be no difficulty; it was her family that would fight. But though Raleigh had not, at that time, any property to speak of, his manner and personal influence were worth twenty thousand a year to him; he attracted everybody. And what a triumph, if he really did marry her! "Who can tell?" I asked myself; and when I went next week to Paris, I was not without hopes.

Two weeks later he sent me a telegram that startled me. It ran as follows:

"Meet me at Marseilles, March 1st. We shall be married there, and then go to London."

I sat down to smoke and consider. One thing was evident—this meant an elopement. Raleigh had conquered the girl, but not the family. To this day, I know not precisely what had taken place, but no doubt there had been romance and passion enough. If Raleigh's feeling for this girl had not been overmastering, he would not have put her in so questionable a position; and she must have loved him with full Italian ardor, thus to follow him to what might be shame, and must (in the eyes of her family) be disgrace. But this was not the worst I feared. The family was powerful, and could put all the machinery of the Italian police in motion to stop the fugitives. Moreover, his civet-cat rival would not rest quiet under such a defeat, and, if he did not challenge Raleigh to a duel, might drive a stiletto into him. Altogether, the prospect was not reassuring.

But my part in the adventure was simple; I went to

Marseilles on the first of March, and waited. The day passed, but Raleigh came not. I remained three days in a state of constantly increasing anxiety. At length I decided to go to Rome and try to find out what was the matter. But a few hours before I was ready to start, the door of my room was opened slowly, and Raleigh came in, alone.

"Don't ask me anything," he said, as I rose to receive him. "You see I'm alone; that's enough for the present."

He looked like one in whom feeling, hope and joy have been burned out. His eyes were dull, his face pale, his voice monotonous; and he was heavy with fatigue and sleeplessness. He sat inertly in a chair, his elbows on the table and his head in his hands. He made no response to my questions, and presently he threw himself on a sofa and fell into a disturbed sleep.

That night he told me something of his story; and further details came to me afterward. The plan of the elopement was elaborated to the smallest detail; the sister was the only confidante of the plot, and she was heartily interested for them. The family were unsuspicious, and as for the rival, he had even made friendly advances, and had induced Raleigh to smoke a cigarette of a peculiar brand, manufactured specially for the little Italian, but which Raleigh abominated as he did all forms of the weed.

On February 26th, the two sisters, with their governess, drove out of the Porto del Popolo, as far as Ponte Molle. There they left the carriage to examine the curious grove of cork-trees. While thus engaged, Raleigh's lady-love stumbled and sprained her ankle. All this was a preconcerted plan, intended to mislead the governess, and, through her, the family. The other

sister went off to find help to convey the pseudo-invalid to her carriage ; and the latter presently sent the governess after her, on some trumped-up errand. The coast being thus cleared, Raleigh emerged from his ambush ; and half an hour later, the lovers were driving at full speed down the Civita Vecchio road.

For an hour more, all went well. Then they were startled by the report of a gun, and the carriage stopped. Conceiving that they were attacked by banditti, Raleigh sprang out, ready to come to any terms, if only the carriage might proceed. Some dozen masked men surrounded him : they would listen to no offers ; some of them seized him, and a violent struggle ensued. Raleigh had just shaken himself free, when a shot, fired by a short man, whose figure, though disguised, he thought he recognized, grazed his chest ; and the next moment a heavy blow on the head from behind knocked him senseless. When he came to himself, he was lying at the side of the road, alone, and the stars were twinkling above him. The leathern satchel containing his money was at his side, pinned to the earth by a knife thrust through it.

Raleigh and I agreed that this last circumstance proved the attack to be no vulgar brigandage ; it was a rescue by the despised rival, and indicated treachery somewhere. Be that as it may, Raleigh never saw the girl again, though he risked everything to get some news of her. It finally became his belief—which subsequent discoveries tended to confirm—that she had been confined in a convent. Whether she became a permanent captive has never transpired, but she was nowhere seen in society after this unlucky adventure, and doubtless she did take the veil ; for, having lost Raleigh, there was nothing else for her in the world.

The shock struck a coldness through my friend's sunny and ardent nature. In less than a year, he resumed his painting, but I noticed that he now cared more than before for pecuniary success, and less for pure art. The money thus rapidly made was as rapidly spent; and he was often paid for pictures long before they were painted. Yet, so great was his facility and reputation, it seemed impossible he should ever need money. His mode of life in other respects was marked by an ingrained, involuntary sort of cynicism. He lived upon the enjoyment of the passing hour, looking neither forward nor upward. He deferred more to convention than formerly—not, as he once told me, because he deemed conventionality of any worth, but because it made life easier. He bore himself with a certain gentlemanly magnificence, but admitted no one behind his curtains. Occasionally he would disappear, for weeks or even months at a time; and though he was careful to forewarn his acquaintances of his departure, and to account for it on some professional pretext, no one knew whither he went, or what he really did. Some said he sojourned among the Chinese Tartars; others, that he smoked opium and gambled in the slums of Liverpool and Hamburg. Such grotesque conjectures reflected the general feeling that Raleigh's ostensible civilization did not adequately express the man; that his nature demanded and would take some revenge on itself.

Such was he at whose studio door I knocked, after my disappointment with Max.

III.

I HAD noticed, as I turned the corner of the quiet street in which the studio was situated, a figure emerge from the door and walk a few steps in my direction. At that distance of a hundred yards, it seemed to be a man rather below the middle height, and foppishly dressed. On catching sight of me, this individual stopped, hesitated, and finally faced about and hastened off the opposite way. I remember that a passing curiosity visited my mind as to what could have been the fellow's business with Raleigh. He had something the look of a foreign gambler.

When I entered the studio, Raleigh's back was turned toward me; he stood with both elbows on the mantelpiece, supporting his head on his hands. As he faced me with a start, I saw that his expression was discomposed, his visage flushed, and on his left temple was visible a small red birth-mark, in the shape of a Greek cross. This mark never appeared except when Raleigh had been under the influence of a violent passion or emotion. I had seen it not more than once or twice before, and consequently noticed its presence now.

Not that I said anything about it—the days for taking such liberties were gone—the intercourse between my friend and me, if it were easier than of yore, sounded shallower depths. I made as if I saw nothing out of the way, and, in a few moments, Raleigh regained his composure. I sat down in a low easy-chair, beside a three-legged Japanese table. I was about to put my hat on

this table, but found it already occupied by a large pocketbook, open and empty, and by a fine cambric handkerchief, from which emanated a peculiar, sweet perfume. Turning to put my hat on the floor on the other side, I found the thick Turkey rug scattered over with cigarette ashes. These things, though intrinsically trifling, had an effect on my mind. The pocketbook I knew to be Raleigh's, but the handkerchief and the tobacco-ashes were not. They might well, however, have appertained to the overdressed personage I had just seen in the street. He must have been sitting in this chair, and Raleigh's discomposure could hardly have been unconnected with his presence. What did it all mean?

Nothing of consequence, probably. Raleigh had acquaintances, made in Europe and elsewhere, of whom I knew nothing. This man might be some model of his, who had aroused his wrath by being impertinent, or he had money transactions with him, or he was a bearer of ill tidings. No matter. I still had enough confidence in my friend to believe that, if he were in any real strait, he would not hesitate to let me help him. So I began to talk in a comfortable tone about my meeting with the little boy, and its sequel. "I will collar him yet, one of these days," I concluded, "and fetch him here."

"I shall never paint any more children," said Raleigh, with a perverseness that occasionally came over him.

"It certainly does need a rare power, in a perfect state of activity, to do them justice; and it wouldn't be surprising if you felt less disposed to attempt it now than, say, fifteen years ago," said I, smiling.

"You think so, too, eh? Well, that's the worst sign yet!" replied he gravely.

"You're not such an ass as to think I was in earnest!"

"I'm not such an ass as to think I am the man I was. I know I'm a fraud, and I know other men who know it and rejoice at it, looking forward to the time when I shall no longer be the fashion. I understand more, and am a cleverer workman than they are, but I betray my muse every day for money, and now I feel that she has begun to deteriorate in earnest, and when I'm dead—or sooner, perhaps—what brings me a thousand dollars now will be thought dear at a hundred. I used to imagine I could pick myself up whenever I chose, and unite the brilliance of my charlatanry to the purity and insight of my earlier work, but I have discovered my mistake."

I had fished for a contradiction, and had brought up this bitter self-indictment. But he was not done yet.

"After all, I have only painted what I am," he said, pacing up and down the room. "There is a sort of sincerity in it, just because it is a cheat! In the old times—in the young times—I could paint a soul because I believed in a soul; now I paint outsides because—no, not because I believe in outsides, for I don't, but—because I no longer see anything else. I was hard hit once—you know all about that. I won't say that I wish it had turned out otherwise; but it shut up something in me that has never been opened since—something without which no man can paint or write or think anything that will last. Of late years I have, without thinking or caring, done things that I should have blushed even to think of when I was twenty-one. It's a plausible superstition—nothing more—that we are punished for our sins; but when evil comes to us, we ransack our memory for whatever we have done in defiance of conscience, and say 'God's revenge!' Blind chance, more

likely! but we must always invent a cause for everything. Though it is strange how close, sometimes, the links between the assumed cause and the effect seem to be! Revenge is at work somewhere, and . . . I beg your pardon, my dear fellow. Take a glass of wine—what can I offer you? I froth away, you see, and mean no harm, as I used to do when we were boys together. My mind appears to run on the young times, this evening. I'm getting stale, I suppose, and need a change. By the way, I'm going to have it. I think of running down to Mexico next week."

"What! in June?"

"All the better; I shall see it in its characteristic state. I have given my housekeeper leave of absence from Saturday night. If you want a lounging-room, where you can be free from interruption, take my pass-key, and come in whenever you like. Of course, I'd rather you came alone."

"I am all the company I shall want. I accept the key with thanks."

Raleigh gazed at me with a wistful sort of smile. "I used rather to patronize you, once upon a time," he said. "I thought I was the better man of the two. Mercy on us, what humbug it all is! Do you know what men are? They are fishermen's nets, cast in the ocean of human nature. Some catch a school of fish, some but two or three, or none, according as we are cast by the Fisherman. I present you with the conceit—work it up in a sonnet—if you write sonnets still."

"*A propos?*"

"Of your saying you could endure your own company. I punish myself with mine, and I get a deal of punishment! I'm no longer proud of my fish. But after all, it is the sea and the fisherman that are responsible."

"Except that we can open ourselves to let the fish in, or close ourselves to keep them out, if I may use your figure."

"Or tear holes in ourselves to let out those that are in," added Raleigh. "But, when all's said, we're only nets, nothing to brag of. How old did you say that little girl was?"

"Little girl? Oh, you mean Max. He's about five."

"What name did you say?"

"Max."

"Max! Max—what?"

"I don't know. It could make no difference to the portrait, which was what I was concerned about."

"And he didn't turn up again? Well, that's all right. But the world is such a small place, he and I may meet yet. This is an Inn of Strange Meetings—my studio, I mean—all studios, for that matter! If I were a murderer, I would give myself out as an artist, hire a studio, arrange a trap-door and an oubliette under the throne, and, when I had taken off on canvas the heads of my sitters (who should be my enemies) I'd pull the catch and let them tumble into eternity. No safer place in the world than a studio to do murder in. Who knows, for instance, who my models are?"

"But that might work both ways."

"How so?"

"Suppose your model should entertain a grudge against you?"

"Not so easy to plot against a man in his own castle. However, I have never murdered anybody, that I can recollect; and they say you never begin to murder after the age of twenty-eight, so my chance is long gone by! With ladies it may be different; they seldom get much

beyond twenty-eight, I believe. Yes, I have missed an opportunity. It is too late. Mexico is a poor substitute !"

Raleigh had made his last few speeches in rather an excited manner, and he was restless in his movements, walking about, standing or leaning in various attitudes, and touching or displacing different objects in the room. He now happened to approach me, and noticed the pocketbook and handkerchief on the table. He snatched them up hastily, and thrust them in the pockets of his velvet lounging-jacket.

"Disorderly beggar, I am !" said he ; "always leaving my things about, and forgetting them. I wish I could choose what to leave and what to forget ! The things I would ransack the universe for I never find ; the other things are always turning up. How original my remarks are this evening ! I must be entering my second childhood. Probably I have lived long enough. Here is a curious thing—this morning I was going to imagine myself doing something (which I mean to do next week), and behold, my imagination was a blank ! I couldn't think of myself as doing anything after Sunday next. Did such a thing ever happen to you ?"

"Very likely—I don't remember."

"In Africa, once, as I was riding along a plain, all at once the familiar horizon line seemed to subside, and the next minute I was on the brink of one of those vertical precipices. It was the same sort of feeling as this. The world (as far as you are concerned) stops short at your feet, instead of keeping fifteen or twenty miles in advance, as usual. And the only warning is that strange blank—as if you were on the verge of nothingness !"

"Does next week seem nothingness to you, then ?"

"Yes, and no, too! Once I rowed out to sea in an open skiff, and between fog and currents and an easterly gale I was soon out of sight of land. I was out all night, and by next morning had given up hope of outliving the adventure. Nothing around me but mist and blankness, out of which came great, sliding, toppling waves. All the world seemed dispersed forever. And yet I never felt so overpowering a sense of my own personality. That boundless vagueness round me seemed to crush me into myself, instead of crushing me out. Not only the physical man—I wasn't so much conscious of that—but that in a man which says 'I,' and is made up of memory and tendency. It was that which became more vivid and compact as the end drew near, and the waves ran higher, and I thought to myself, 'whatever happens to my flesh and bones, the thing that says *I* will be just as capable of saying it an eternity hence as at this moment.' But soon afterward, the fog drifted aside and revealed the shore a few miles away. And no sooner did I clap eyes on it than the pressure of the eternities and immensities relaxed, and I felt less alive than at any time since death was near."

"Odd, I never heard you tell that yarn before!"

"Well, perhaps you'll never catch me again in the gushing mood. I do feel a kind of light-heartedness, like a man who has just got money to settle an old score that has been galling him. Unluckily, there's no warrant for such relief in my case—quite the contrary! But, as we said at school (there I go again, you see!) 'What's the odds a hundred years hence?' The master may thrash us, but that's soon over, and by and by we shall receive our diplomas just the same!"

"So Max is really not to have his beauty immortalized," said I, getting up to depart. "If you had seen

him, you couldn't have resisted, for Mexico or anything else. I wonder why he didn't turn up?"

"Some people are superstitious about having their portraits taken," replied Raleigh. "Probably the boy's mother has some such scruples. Must you be going so soon? Let me see you again before I go—or, no, perhaps, better not. I shall be busy; at all events, it can do no harm to say good-by now. Farewell! Say nothing about the Mexico trip until I am well out of the way."

We shook hands, and I left him amid the shadows of his great studio.

IV.

It was certainly not surprising that I should have dreamed of Raleigh that night; in what I had heard and seen and thought during my visit to him, there was ample material to furnish a basis for dreams. Nevertheless, I am not satisfied by the common explanations—which explain nothing—of dreams. At least, I hold dreams to be of two kinds—those devised by the dreamer's own helpless and rudderless brain, and those in which the helm is taken by some independent intelligence, and his mind guided to regions unattainable by any force inherent in itself. Everybody, I suppose, has had dreams or visions of this kind. The dream I am about to relate was as vivid and consistent as reality itself; and the mark it left on my memory was that of an intimate personal adventure.

It seemed to me that I had decided, for some reason that I have forgotten, to see Raleigh again before he left. I believe I had something of importance to give him; perhaps a piece of advice, perhaps a commission for Havana cigars; but no matter. I was in a great hurry, my impression being that he was on the point of setting out on his journey, and that I was behindhand. I hailed a cab, and promised the driver an extra quarter to drive fast. As we rattled along, I noticed the shops were closed; it was (in my dream) Sunday, though in reality it was Friday night.

At the studio door I paid and dismissed my cab, and rang the bell. I heard it sound upstairs, but there was

no response. After ringing again, I bethought myself of the pass-key Raleigh had given me. It was in my pocket; I opened the door and ran upstairs. No misgiving lest Raleigh might already have departed occurred to me, though that is the inference I should have drawn in a waking state, from his not having answered the bell. But I knew, in some mysterious but (to me) sure way, that Raleigh was in his studio; and, moreover, that some one else was there with him.

I entered the studio without knocking, and was not surprised to observe that I was seen neither by Raleigh nor by his companion. For I was invisible, and my object in being there was, as it now appeared, simply and solely to witness what was taking place between Raleigh and the other. I had already recognized the latter—it was the foppish and objectionable creature whom I had seen on the street on the occasion of my actual visit. My dislike of him was confirmed in my dream, but at the same time modified in a curious manner; as if my first objection to him had been founded on an erroneous conception of his character, whereas now I knew and disliked him more thoroughly on truer grounds. He was sitting in the chair beside the Japanese table, and was talking volubly in a singular voice—a voice by no means disagreeable in its quality—on the contrary, it was melodious and flexible—but which, nevertheless, sounded unpleasantly as coming from *him*. He held a half-smoked cigarette in his left hand; it had gone out, and, perceiving this, he placed it in a silver card-receiver on the table. Then he rose from his chair and approached Raleigh, who was standing with folded arms, leaning back against the mantelpiece, and who had not yet spoken.

A sort of division of consciousness now took place

within me; still remaining the invisible spectator of the scene, I at the same time entered into Raleigh's mind, as it were; and, in so far, identified myself with him. The disagreeable stranger was thus a stranger no longer, there had been a knowledge of him on Raleigh's part, dating back for many years, but they had not always been on ill terms with each other, and, at one epoch, had been bound together by a powerful bond. This bond had afterward become irksome, chiefly through Raleigh's fault. Bitter hatred followed, intensified by Raleigh's discovery that he had been deceived where he had most fully trusted. Affairs had latterly been approaching a crisis. Within that very hour an ultimatum had been offered by the visitor, and rejected by Raleigh. What would happen next?

"Will nothing move you?" asked the visitor, standing before him, and looking with a keen, oblique glance into his face.

"No; and do your worst; it can't be worse than—that!"

"It would be no sacrifice to you. I would go away, and leave you free. It is a mere form—the utterance of a word that costs you nothing, and yet, *to us*, makes all the difference between light and darkness. It isn't the money—I would waive that! Nor need it limit your action toward any other person. It shall be a secret between us to the end. As much as this you owe me!"

"If you needed but a drop of blood to keep you alive, I would not give it you. You deceived me beyond forgiveness, and traded on it for years. You invited what befell, and I will never lift a finger to compensate you. I only regret having so far debased myself, in a moment of pity, as to have consented to what you now call an injury."

"You are a bold man to tell me that!"

"I fear nothing you can do."

"Yes, you are stronger than I am; you can knock me senseless, or strangle me. Perhaps you intend that? Do you know I have those letters in my pocket? Why not take them from me and destroy them?"

"If you were to put them in my hands, I would give them back to you. I want no further concealments. I have long been tired of this kind of life. Let there be a change! And the change you bring is as welcome as any!"

"Raleigh, you hate me. Do you think I hate you?"

"It is the only agreeable thing I can believe of you."

"It was not from hating you that I am what I am! You refuse me, and you defy me. But I will do something you do not think of. I will remember the old time. What I have done hitherto was done as a duty, not to myself only. You will not look at things from my side; you will not admit my temptations—my excuses. But it suits me to admit yours, to acknowledge that I wronged you; and—to do this!"

So saying, the speaker took from his pocket a small bundle of half a dozen letters, and tore them rapidly into small pieces. As he did so, he occasionally raised his eyes to Raleigh's, and when he had done he threw out his arms, and gave a light laugh.

There was a pause.

"Why did you do that?" asked Raleigh at length.

"To gain the right to do something else."

"What is that?"

"To ask your forgiveness!"

Raleigh gazed fixedly at the other, asking himself: "Is this a new deception?" But then he reflected that it could not be; for he had seen with his own eyes the

destruction of the only evidence that could be used against him. Whatever cause he had to hate this person, the deed just done was noble. It might not compensate for years of barren life; but it was, none the less, a great and honorable forbearance on the other's part. It deserved acknowledgment. A tenderer feeling struggled in Raleigh's heart. He held out his right hand.

Then I regretted my invisibility, and that I could utter no warning word. For I was conscious of a deadly peril meancing Raleigh, whereof he suspected nothing. With all my strength I struggled to cry out, to fling myself between them; and, in that vain struggle, I awoke, shuddering, with the wet hair clinging to my forehead.

V.

While the first impression of this dream—which seemed rather like a vision than a dream, so vivid was it—was still strong upon me, I had no other thought than to go straight to Raleigh and relate it to him. This was early in the morning, however, too early to knock up Raleigh, even had the necessity been more immediate; and by the time I had completed my toilet and eaten my breakfast, and smoked a cigarette or two, I found it possible to look at the matter from a more common-sensible point of view.

A dream is not a reality, after all, however vivid it may appear; and what seems to the sleeper terrible may wear another complexion when viewed in broad daylight. Moreover, the waking mind will sometimes, unconsciously, impart to the disordered scenes of a dream a logical sequence and precision which the dream itself did not actually possess. Again, the obtrusion of the familiar facts and things of every-day life—the chairs and tables, the view from the window, the rattle of vehicles in the street, the voices of men and women—all conspire to make the fantasy of the night more unsubstantial than a thought.

By ten o'clock, accordingly, I had resolved to postpone my intention of bursting headlong in upon Raleigh with a tale of horror and warning; I even questioned whether it were worth while to call upon him at all previous to his departure. And, should I do so, and the subject of the dream were to be introduced, I made up

my mind to tell it from the humorous point of view, leaving my friend to draw from it what conclusions he might see fit.

In this convenient frame of mind, I sat down in my easy-chair and unfolded my Saturday newspaper. I had not reached the end of my second editorial when Raleigh himself was announced. He was, to all appearances, in excellent spirits, and the vigor and liveliness of his aspect reflected a rather absurd light upon my misgivings of the night before.

"Don't disarrange yourself, my dear fellow," he said; "I only looked in for a couple of minutes. I intend to leave town, you know, by this evening's train. I merely wished to say that you will find the studio at your disposal, if you should take it into your head to drop in there at any time. I have taken the duplicate pass-key from my old housekeeper; so you must be careful not to lose the one I gave you, or you would be locked out till I came back from Mexico."

"I thought, perhaps, you would decide to remain in town over Sunday?" I could not help saying.

"No; not so far as I have reason to think at present," he replied, without betraying any sign of comprehending my drift. "The truth is, I am in a hurry to be off. I am homesick upside down—I'm sick of home! I want to see palm-trees, and black eyes, and Aztec temples! My sensibilities have been growing very stale of late. Such morbid sloughs of despond as you saw me wallowing in yesterday must be abandoned, for good and all. When you see me next, you will behold a transfiguration!"

"Have you any last messages for your forlorn friends?" I asked, smiling.

Raleigh smiled too, but, methought, with a somewhat

ambiguous expression. "There are some friends of mine to whom it might be well to leave a parting word," he replied. "But, as they don't happen to be people with whom you are acquainted—and as the message might not be considered complimentary—it is no matter. By the by, you will find in the top drawer of the old mirror-cabinet—you know the one I mean—a bundle of etchings that I would like you to look at. I picked them up in Amsterdam last year, and have only just come across them again, while unpacking a trunk. I think one of them is an undoubted Rembrandt."

"As to that, I shall reserve my opinion. Well, may you enjoy the Aztec eyes, and come back again safe and sound!"

"Ah! if one could but leave nine tenths of himself behind, when one makes a journey—or, at any rate, as large a bundle of his disreputable appurtenances as Christian lugged on his shoulders—what a wholesome thing our holiday jaunts would become, and how much at a loss to recognize us would our friends be, when we returned! If coming back safe and sound means coming back with as dead a weight of moral adipose tissue as you set out with, it is hardly so friendly a wish as I presume you meant it to be. But—well—I am only wasting your time, and spending too much of my own. I didn't want to leave you with such an impression of me as you must have got yesterday on your mind. Forget my moral and metaphysical hypochondriasis, and remember me as you see me now!"

"All that is too late, Raleigh," I said. "We have known each other for a good many years, and my impressions of you have long ceased to be detached, and have become composite. I don't believe anything could greatly modify it, one way or the other. Your lights

and your shadows, as I have been accustomed to see them, make up your reality for me, and I could hardily imagine you as either better or worse. I don't think I should want to see you transfigured—until I had become transfigured myself!"

"Upon the whole," he remarked, musingly, "that is as comfortable a thing as you could have said to me. And yet, it tempts me to put you to the test with—with some confession or other, which, perhaps, would not tend altogether toward the transfiguration!" He paused a few moments, gazing at me doubtfully. "No!" he suddenly said, "No, I won't risk it—bother you with it, I mean—at any rate, not this morning; for it would be a long time before I should have an opportunity to counteract the bad impression. It's enough if I hold it over you for some future occasion. For the present, then, let the lights and shadows remain as they are."

He laughed, grasped my hand with more than usual heartiness, and went away, leaving me to resume my communion with the Saturday newspaper. If I recollect aright, however, I did not read any more that day. I went to the club, lunched there, dawdled through the afternoon, and dined at Mrs. Blessington Wagner's, where I half expected (a musical soirée being in prospect) that I might meet the Countess Almara. But she failed to make her appearance, and I returned home at eleven o'clock, tired, and somewhat depressed.

As a general thing, I don't go to church, and Sunday is apt to be a rather long day with me. But, on this particular Sunday, it happened to occur to me that the Countess was under an engagement to sing the anthem at a certain fashionable house of worship not far from my abode; so I betook myself thither, and sat in a retired pew, behind a marble column, and listened to that grand

contralto voice of hers—positively, the most touching and stirring voice I have ever heard. In the afternoon I was enterprising enough to go down to her modest little house in Clinton Place, hoping to have a quiet chat with her, but she was not at home. I left my card, and strolled through Washington Square, and almost got lost in the curious region that lies west and north of it. Once, I fancied that I caught a glimpse of my faithless little friend Max; but before I could confirm my impression, he had disappeared—if it were he; and, in the place where he had stood, up started a hideous little wretch, in a soiled and ragged skirt, who stared at me with a pair of pale blue, red-rimmed eyes, set in a thin, grimy little face. As I approached him, he suddenly uttered a shrill howl, and bolted down a flight of steps leading to a tenement-house basement.

My rest, for the last two nights, had been disturbed and restless, and I looked forward to nothing better for the third; but my expectations were agreeably disappointed. I slept soundly, and without a dream, and did not awake until after my usual hour. I was conscious of an improvement in my spirits, I felt as if some wearisome suspense or anxiety had come to an end. I determined to pay a visit to the studio during the day, and have a look at the etchings. As I anticipated being detained over the luncheon hour on this agreeable errand, I put some biscuits in my pocket—wine, I knew, I should find on the premises. It was about noon when I unlocked the door with the pass-key, and went upstairs.

VI.

The door of the studio stood half open. As I pushed it wide and entered, the room seemed very dusky; the green shade of the main window was drawn, and the shutters of the other windows were closed. The air, too, was close and oppressive. I groped my way across the floor, found the cord of the green shade, and pulled it up; then I went to the small window in the alcove, which I opened top and bottom. Having thus relieved the gloom and freshened the atmosphere, I turned to the cabinet. It was a handsome piece of furniture, standing against the wall at the end of the room farthest from the door. The upper part consisted mainly of folding-doors, opening on shelves; in the panels were set mirrors of plate glass with bevelled edges. At the side was a sort of light scaffolding of brackets, supported on slender carved pillars, each bracket bearing a small vase of some quaint design. The lower portion of the cabinet was a chest of solidly made ebony drawers, with handles of polished brass. It was in the uppermost of these drawers that the etchings were kept.

Seating myself before the cabinet, and pulling open the drawer, I began the examination of the collection. There was a mass of scraps of paper, of different sizes, colors and textures, each with some drawing or other upon it; but I had no difficulty in picking out the etchings; they were inclosed by themselves in a sheet of large letter-paper. There were not more than half a dozen in all; but one of them, certainly, looked marvel-

lously like a Rembrandt. Yet, if so, it was from a plate that I had never seen or heard of. It represented a man seated in a chair, in a dusky light, in an attitude of deep meditation ; a woman stood behind him, her figure dark against the window in the background. Upon scrutinizing this figure, I saw that she held something in her hand that looked like a small knife or dagger, and something in her expression and stealthy attitude inspired me with the notion that she entertained sinister designs against the meditative man's throat.

While studying this strange design, my eye was attracted by a peculiar dark stain on the edge of the paper. It was neither black nor brown, and could not have been caused, as I had at first supposed, by ink. It was not even quite dry, and the paper was slightly wrinkled, the result of the unusual contraction occasioned by moisture.

For some reason this spot fascinated my attention. It repelled me, but I was on that account only the more strongly impelled to examine it. What had caused it ? There was nothing in the spot itself to answer the question ; but I presently bethought me to seek an explanation in the drawer. Upon pulling the contents about a little, I finally brought out an object which I at first took to be one of Raleigh's painting-rags, such as he employed for wiping his brushes or smearing his canvas. It was clewed up in a small bundle, scarcely so large as a clenched fist, and was much discolored. Taking hold of it gingerly, by its least soiled part, I shook it out, and held it up to the light.

Its folds stuck together with a kind of glutinous tenacity. The coloring matter with which it had been saturated was still damp ; here and there it had a faint glisten, and in one place, where the light shone through, the hue was of a deep, clouded red. What could have pos-

sessed Raleigh, naturally a very fastidious man, to put this unclean rag into a drawer full of priceless etchings? It could not have been there long—hardly longer than since the day previous. But, on that day, Raleigh had expected to be on his way south. Yet, if he had not put it there, who could have done so? At this moment my heart began to beat quickly; I looked at the thing more closely. A strange odor—resembling no other odor in the world—now became perceptible. As I recognized its nature, it forced me to the conviction against which, from the first, I had been unconfessedly struggling. That odor was the smell of human blood!

The moisture dried up in my mouth and throat, and there was a fluttering in the nerves of my head nearly resulting in faintness. But I soon got the better of this weakness, reminding myself that either there was worse to come—in which case all my self-possession would be needed—or else this was all, and, in that case, there was nothing worth disturbing one's self about.

The rag, upon further scrutiny, appeared to be not a rag, but a handkerchief, of fine make and material, apparently cambric. One corner of it had been either cut off or torn away. It was heavy with blood; more than could have flowed from any ordinary wound. My mind had now—in self-defence, as it were—adopted a strictly logical humor; all imaginative speculations were rigidly suppressed. My determination was, to take nothing for granted, until sensible evidence had assured me of its truth. If any disaster had happened, it must have happened within the four walls of this studio, and I must inevitably come upon further traces of it in due time.

Having laid the handkerchief across the edge of the open drawer, I prepared to rise from my chair, and begin an exploration of the room. I was inclined to think that

the worst thing discoverable could not be in the studio, because, had it been there, I could hardly have failed to notice it on my first entrance. But an instant's reflection admonished me that the blinds had then been drawn, not only obscuring objects in the studio, but leading me to confine most of my attention to setting the blinds to rights.

As these thoughts strayed across my brain, I was sitting facing the mirror in one of the panels, and my eyes dwelt in a preoccupied way upon its surface, on which appeared a round whitish spot, caused, as I supposed, by a defect in the quicksilver. It stood out against the darkness of the reflected room behind it—not that the room was really dark any longer, but it seemed so in the mirror. Moving my head a little, however, I noticed that the white spot remained in the same place, relatively to the background, instead of traversing it, as would have been the case had it been on the surface of the glass. For the first time, I now looked past the surface into the depths. The white object had a pallid appearance, and seemed to rest on the back of a chair. Was it a "tidy"? No. It was of an oval shape, and had two darker spots on its upper part. I strained my eyes yet farther.

All at once the truth came over me with a sharp pang. The white object was a human face—the face of a man seated in the chair, and apparently returning my gaze. Who could this man be, unless he were Raleigh himself? It was Raleigh! And what was he doing there? Had he been playing a practical joke, to scare me out of my wits? or was he asleep? At all events, there he was. I did not turn my head to look at him, however; but, still keeping my eyes upon the reflection, I said in a low voice:

"Well, Raleigh?"

My voice sounded faint and hollow in that great room;

and there was no response whatever from Raleigh. After waiting a moment, my feeling of suspended alarm—if I may so call it—experienced a revulsion, and made me realize how profoundly and certainly I had foreboded calamity. I was now alive with a sensation of indescribable horror. Slowly raising myself in my chair, I once more gazed in the mirror. I could not control a slight tremor of my head, which rendered distinct vision difficult; but I could see that Raleigh's face was posed in an odd and awkward attitude. It was inclined toward his right shoulder in a way that put me in mind of the grotesque contortion of some grimacing clown at a pantomime. But the clown's contortion was momentary, whereas Raleigh had retained his attitude ever since I had first caught sight of him—and, possibly, very much longer. The entire figure, as well as I could discern it in the glass, had a sort of rigid twist in it, much at variance with Raleigh's habitual poses of robust grace. One of his hands was clenched, and partly raised from the arm of the chair; but the attitude of the head was the most unnatural of all.

Of course I was humoring myself—struggling to delay the inrush of the truth until I could gain nerve to face it resolutely. But the feeling that the thing I dreaded was behind me, and, as it were, staring over my shoulder, became at this point unendurable. I rose from my chair abruptly, turned round, and, with measured but leaden steps, walked up to the seated figure and compelled myself to look at it.

Hideous to contemplate is the ungainly immobility of death. Its unstudied effects, its unshrinking sincerity, put life to shame. The soul, as if to show its contempt for the clay it has ceased to inhabit, throws it, at parting, into some antic posture of forlornness that would

excite ridicule were it less unaffectedly ghastly. It was as if some malignant enemy of Raleigh had, in his absence, set up this dishonorable effigy of him by way of satirizing the real man's conspicuous (and, perhaps, not unconscious) physical picturesqueness. And the worst of the joke was, that Raleigh would never come back to efface the absurd impression of him thus created. But neither, on the other hand, would he ever know how vilely he had been traduced. . . .

I put aside the hysteric mood that threatened to gain possession of me, and set myself to examine the body. The chair in which it was seated was drawn up beside the little table which I have already once or twice alluded to. On the opposite side of the table was a vacant chair, suggesting the idea that some person had been conversing with Raleigh previous to the catastrophe. Upon the table was a silver ash-tray, and, lying in it, a half-smoked cigarette. Another object was there—an open razor, the handle smeared with blood, though the blade seemed to have been wiped nearly clean. It was one of Raleigh's own razors, for there was his name engraved upon the silver plate set in the handle.

There were no traces of a struggle. The body, though somewhat contorted, could not have risen from its seat at the time when death overtook it. It lay back, with one leg stretched out, and the head twisted back and sideways toward the shoulder, which was spasmodically drawn up. The eyes were wide open, and the eyebrows lifted; through the parted lips the set teeth were visible. Low down across the throat was a deep, clean cut, dividing the windpipe and severing the jugular vein. A great effusion of blood had taken place, drenching collar and neckscarf and flowing down the breast. There were no other wounds. This one had been enough.

I glanced about the room in search of whatever traces of the murderer might present themselves. But nothing of a suspicious character was to be seen. Upon the rug in front of the fireplace I noticed some torn scraps of paper, and upon the hearth below the grate a number of similar scraps had been burned. I picked up the largest of these scraps, and examined it; it had only one complete word written on it, and that was the name of a town in Holland—Amsterdam. The handwriting was Raleigh's. He had probably been destroying some old letters before leaving town.

There seemed to be nothing further for me to do; for the task of tracing the murderer devolved upon others than I. My only duty was to apprise the police of what had happened, give them such information and suggestions as I might find it possible to afford, and let them set about their work.

Before leaving the studio, I returned to the body of the man whom I had sincerely loved, and contemplated it attentively for a long time. My first nervous agitation had now passed away, and I was glad to note how little the dead reminded me of the living. Yes, the effigy was a poor one; many a caricaturist, methought, would have succeeded better. Raleigh, my friend, had been a being quite different from this.

The remnant of the cigarette still lay in the silver ash-tray. I picked it up and put it in my cigarette-case, for it recurred to my memory how I had seen it in my dream two nights before—a dream which I now half fancied had been prophetic. Then, before leaving the studio hastily, I descended the stairs and hurried off to the nearest police-station. An officer was detailed to accompany me back to the studio.

VII.

MURDERS are common enough in New York; but the violent death of a man like Raleigh was not so every-day an occurrence that it could fail to throw society into something like a panic; and though it happened at a moment when many people were out of town, there was no lack of talk about it. The newspapers all had their say—moral, historical and philosophical, together with minute details of the circumstances in which the body was found, and the clew the police were said to possess to the identity of the criminal. My own unlucky name, of course, figured prominently wherever reference was made to the affair, and I suspect that not a few of my intimate friends imbibed the idea that I was probably the murderer. It required all my resolution not to leave New York at once. But, at this painful juncture, I received a note from the Countess Almara, the purport of which afforded me the first gleam of consolation I had enjoyed since the calamity took place.

"Dear friend," wrote the Countess, "I have a closer interest than most persons know in the terrible event which is now being everywhere discussed. Several years ago, on the Continent I met your late friend, and he did me a kindness which I shall never forget. Since that time, I have seen nothing of him; and although, when I came to this country, I hoped that we might meet each other at the house of some common friend, that did not happen, and I was unwilling to seem to force myself upon his notice. Until a day or two ago, I was not

aware that you were so intimately his friend. Will you not, some day, find an hour to come here and talk with me about him? I have something to say. The other day I found your card here, so you know where I live. To-morrow evening, after seven o'clock, I shall be at home, if you could come then.

"Very sincerely yours,

"ALMARA."

I have not as yet found an opportunity to do more than allude to the Countess. My acquaintance with her, though not of long standing, was to me a fact of no trifling moment. I had found her to be a woman capable of affording, to a mature and somewhat fastidious man of the world like myself, a companionship for which I had cause to be morally and intellectually grateful. Very few women of this type, I should suppose, exist; the combination of qualities essential to their evolution must be rare. Though inwardly and emotionally feminine, they possess an almost masculine breadth and temper of mind, and they manifest a vein of sympathetic kindliness not incompatible with an arch and subtle kind of wit. Such women have had a varied and genuine experience of life, which they use as a sort of magic wand, to touch into significance the topic of the moment. What particular form of religious belief they hold is of small import, provided its tenets constitute the real basis and criterion of their activity; for mere scepticism fatally unsexes the woman who, in other respects, may be all loveliness. Furthermore, they possess, and dare to use, the power of beguiling men into becoming oblivious of their external charms, in the enjoyment of that spiritual correspondence of beauty, which is neither intellect nor education, but, rather, the graceful conformation and

behavior of both. To secure this end, however, their physical attractions must not be too poignant; a moderate comeliness is enough, but I apprehend that genuine homeliness is better. The man is then relieved of the conventional obligation to be complimentary, and the woman from the distraction of expecting compliments, and both are as much at ease as—and yet under a much finer social stimulus than—either could be in the company of his or her respective sex.

To return to the Countess. She was a woman certainly not less than thirty years old, and probably not more than five-and-thirty. What her nationality might be, I knew not; her husband, I believe, had been a Pole; and she spoke several languages with ease and accuracy. Her marriage was understood to have taken place at a comparatively early age; and she soon became a widow under somewhat tragic circumstances. After her husband's death she lived in Paris, Berlin, and other European capitals, and was on a footing of familiarity with the best society. She was believed, moreover, to be acquainted with the inside history of many of the chief political movements of the day. At the outbreak of the Franco-German War her sympathies were on the French side. She was with the army in the capacity of nurse, and appears to have been the object of the same kind of affection, among the soldiers, that Florence Nightingale inspired fourteen years before in the Crimea. There were many anecdotes of her courage and devotion. At the epoch of the Commune she was in Paris; and afterward she lived for a time in Italy.

When I first met her, a few months previous to the date of which I am now writing, she had not been in America more than a year. Her fortunes were at a low ebb, but she bravely supported herself by the exercise of

her extraordinary talent for music. She sang in the choirs of more than one church, set songs to music, and took pupils for instruction. Meanwhile, by dint of the sterling value of her mind and talents, and by a pleasant and quiet geniality of manner, she made and kept many warm friends among both the men and the women of our best society. Such is a brief epitome of so much as was generally known of what would seem to have been a noble and self-sacrificing life, deeply tinged with sadness and misfortune, but never losing heart, or forfeiting the respect of honorable people.

For my own part, however, I had never concerned myself much with Countess Almara's past career. My theory was, that a human being is worth to me exactly as much as I find in him or her; and that to allow my opinion of a friend to be influenced by the echoes, good or bad, of her previous history, would be as good as to give up friendship altogether. In Almara I saw a woman to whom I could express such shy thoughts as reside in the most secluded part of a man's mind, assured that they would be received by her with kindness and comprehension, and would call forth from her a responsive and suggestive train of reflection and comment. Her influence upon me from the first had been at once soothing and awakening; her receptiveness enabled me to reveal to her whatever small stores of wisdom or avenues of speculation I had chanced upon; and she cast a fresh life upon my most novel ideas. She really understood my true character better than any other woman or man has done; and I, in return, could flatter myself that I had a deeper insight than most of her friends into the motives and conclusions of her own life.

Let it not be inferred, however, that our conversation always took a personal turn. On the contrary, it was

seldom that either of us introduced (save in the way of illustration) any mention of particular facts or persons. Our intercourse proceeded on a loftier plane, and our pleasure in it resulted largely from this elevation. There was something deeper than friendship in my regard for Almara; and if it had never kindled into love, it was because she had not offered, nor had I sought any passionate grounds of sympathy. The bloom of the world was, perhaps, somewhat sullied for both of us; nor had I confidence to try, with the jaded pinions of forty years, the romantic flights which had failed at twenty-seven.

And yet, had I thought about it, I might have perceived that the Countess was not less capable than she had ever been of winning a man's heart. Handsome she certainly was not; I should rather say she was noticeable for a wholesome and intelligent style of ugliness. It was a likeable and interesting ugliness; the parts were good, though the combination was eccentric. She was a trifle above the average height of women; her shoulders were square and high, and her neck short. The lower part of her face was resolute and somewhat heavy; her mouth was large, but the upper lip was finely and sensitively moulded. Her nose was straight and well formed, with expanding nostrils; her eyes were far apart, and as black as Erebus. Her hands and feet were beautifully shaped; and her hair, which she wore short, was wavy and fine, and matched her eyes in color. The movements of her features, under the influence of thought and feeling, were more eloquent than their form; and her gestures, and a way she had, while talking, of suddenly leaning forward and resting her elbow on her knee—these, and other unstudied things that she did, and which the absence of regular beauty enabled her to do with impunity, imparted to her conversation a force and character that

kept her interlocutor agreeably alert. Her voice was soft and clear, and susceptible of the most delicate shades of emphasis, and her smile was quick and intelligent.

I was sometimes myself surprised at my knowledge of these and similar details of the Countess Almara's personal appearance and bearing, for my opportunities of observing her had not been numerous, nor under especially favorable conditions. We had met only in the way that people are accustomed to meet in New York society—in drawing-rooms, at afternoon and evening receptions, at dinners and musical gatherings, in the box at the opera, at art galleries. A hundred other men had the same opportunities, and any one might have overheard almost every word we uttered. But a familiar experience of social forms enables one to use them pliantly for one's occasions, instead of being hampered by them; and often they afforded a freedom and independence not so easily gained in circumstances less ostensibly public. There is pleasure and profit in many kinds of outward restraint and etiquette; they stimulate the mind to liveliness, and give the precision of touch necessary for accomplishing a purpose. I knew that the Countess gave afternoon teas at her little house on every other Friday; but I had never as yet happened to attend one—partly from accident, partly, no doubt, because I was aware that my chances of conversation with her would be less in her own parlor than in any one else's. Nor had I ever called upon her alone (except upon that one occasion when I did not find her at home). I being a bachelor and she a widow, it seemed advisable to give no opening to the forays of idle tongues—though, doubtless, we might have afforded to disregard them.

But at a juncture so exceptional as the present, ordinary rules may safely be disregarded; and I recognized

the fitness of the Countess's straightforward invitation. Hitherto we had met upon impersonal grounds ; but now, a common friend had, by his death, imposed upon us a more confidential sort of communion. I answered her note at once, and, between seven and eight o'clock, I rang at her door.

VIII.

The Countess Almara was dressed in a close-fitting black gown, with white collar and cuffs, and, round her neck, a heavy antique gold chain and locket. Her dark complexion was unusually pale, and as I entered her black eyes met mine searchingly. The hand she gave me was cold as death.

"I am glad," she said. "I feared you might not come. Ah! you look troubled."

"The dead have it all their own way; but they don't let us have ours."

"Yes; they are free!" rejoined the Countess, glancing round the room and sighing. "It is the murderer who suffers the real death."

The event had evidently stirred her deeply; and my presence, who had almost heard Raleigh's dying groan, added to her emotion. During the first minutes of our interview she scarcely maintained her usual calm, and her eyes constantly followed all my movements, and the changes of my face. I had never seen her under the sway of strong feeling, though I knew her capacity for it; and the spectacle softened and composed my own distress. We began to speak of indifferent matters, and our true preoccupation appeared only in the tones of our voices. At length she asked me whether the police had made any discoveries.

"They are following their clew," I replied, "but, so far, to no purpose."

"A clew? have they one?" she asked, eagerly, folding her hands and leaning forward.

"Nothing very satisfactory, though it has more weight with me than with them. A few days before the murder I saw a man leave the studio; and, entering the studio just after, I found Raleigh looking greatly out of sorts."

"And could you describe the man—identify him?"

"He was not near enough for me to distinguish his features; but I think I should recognize his figure and general appearance."

"Ah! but I fear that would not do," said the Countess, unclasping her hands and leaning back. "So many figures are alike—only the face is distinctive. One could not swear to a figure. And yet, perhaps, the man you saw may be the guilty one; but, unless other testimony pointed to him, he would escape."

"You are right," said I, wondering whether the Countess believed in dreams.

"Is it true what the papers say—that he was about leaving the country?" she asked.

"He told me he was off for Mexico; but he must have decided to start a day later than he intended, for the doctors say death could not have taken place earlier than Sunday."

"Then, when you went there—on Monday, was it?—you did not expect to find him in. But how did you get in? was the door open?"

"He gave me his pass-key, and I went up to look at some etchings. But no doubt the murderer knew he intended going away, and based his calculations on the probability of the crime remaining long undiscovered. Had he chosen any other time, of course Raleigh would have been missed at once; but, as it was, the body (as far as he could know) was safer in the studio than at the bottom of the East River."

The Countess took her chin in her hand and meditated, moving her foot on the floor at intervals. At length she said, in a low voice, and with her eyes downcast:

"Shall I say something to you? Because you were his friend, and I, also. It shall be between us two."

"You may say anything to me, Countess."

"Well, then—I have been thinking about him—how he was strong both in light and shade—vehement sometimes; one found him sad and gloomy for no reason that could be told; life would seem hateful to him. And he believed that one had absolute rights over one's self—that there is no obligation except to respect others' rights and freedom. Was it not so?"

"No doubt—to some extent. You knew him better than I thought."

"He did not disguise himself," she said, with a movement of her shoulders; "it was not difficult to know so much. But I have thought, also, that he was not a man likely to make enemies—deadly enemies. He would not so injure any one as to make them hate him. It is easier to believe that he had fallen into some misfortune—perhaps something that he would consider a disgrace. The horror, to him, of thinking that the world might hear of it—"

"I see your meaning, dear Countess," I said, glad to interrupt her in so painful an explanation. "You will be relieved to know that the circumstances make it impossible that death should have been caused by his own act. Two facts alone are enough to dispose of that theory."

"Ah! . . . yes, it is a relief! The newspapers have said nothing that . . . tell me how you can be sure?"

"In the first place, the drawer of the cabinet con-

tained a handkerchief soaked with blood, which must have been put there at the time of the murder. This cabinet is at least twenty paces from the chair in which the body was seated; and no man, after having cut his own throat, could have walked there and back. Then, the razor, although it was within reach of his hand, had been wiped dry—but not by Raleigh. The murderer, after doing the deed, must have lost his head for a while. His first impulse had been to remove the traces of blood from the razor; then it had occurred to him to suggest the idea of suicide; so he left the razor on the table, and hid the handkerchief in the drawer. He would have taken it with him, but for fear of getting blood-stains on his clothes. He would better have left it on the table beside the razor."

At this point, the Countess rose from her seat, with arms extended before her and palms averted, as if to repel the vision my words had summoned up. Her eyes were half closed, and the eyelids quivered. She spoke huskily and below her breath.

"Hush! hush! You do not know what you are doing! I cannot listen to these things—have I not told you I knew him? Oh, oh! I have seen murder!" she went on, pressing her hands over her eyes. "Blood is a fearful thing to wash a handkerchief in! It dizzies the brain and quells the heart—and then people come and reason over it, and explain how and why. . . . Do not look at me! Do not listen to me!" She sank down on the sofa, and turning away her face, sobbed heavily for several minutes.

It was an outburst worthy of a great tragic actress, but it was evidently not acting. It gave me an impression of the power and vividness of the woman's nature, which, well as I thought I knew her, took me by sur-

prise. At first I was disposed to ascribe it to a tenderer interest in Raleigh than she had given me cause to suspect. But she soon corrected this misapprehension. Lifting herself from her half-recumbent position, she passed her hands over her hair, checked her uneven breathing, and looked at me with a smile.

"I shall not ask you to pardon me," she said, "because, if you require my excuses, I shall be inexcusable to you. Your words brought back other days to me—terrible days! I have never told you of my husband. He was a Pole—a conspirator; he met the fate of many who loved their country. I saw his death—a bloody and violent death! Ah! one does not forget those things—they are as present to-day as ten years ago. And yet, it is a strange thing—on the battlefield I have seen so much of death, and it passed away from me; but that one little scene, of a few minutes—never!"

I could only tell her how grieved I was to have recalled such painful memories. The truth was, I suppose, I had so accustomed myself to discuss the matter with policemen and detectives, that I had dulled my own sensitiveness. And yet, Raleigh was my dearest friend!

"Is no one known," asked the Countess, "who is likely to have had a motive to wish his death?"

"There is one person, that I happen to have heard of, and he might answer the description of the man I saw; he looked like an Italian."

"An Italian?"

"There was an Italian nobleman—a rival of Raleigh's for the love of a girl in Rome. The family opposed Raleigh; there was an attempted elopement; he was wounded by the leader of a band of men dressed like banditti; but he recognized the Italian nobleman."

"But, if the rival was successful, why should he wish Raleigh's life, after all these years—if that is your meaning?"

"The girl was lost to him as well as to Raleigh—entered a convent, I believe; and possibly there may have been other circumstances. I know that Raleigh had lately had troubles that he would not explain."

The Countess remained silent awhile, plunged in thought. "Do you know," she said, presently, "that seems to me more than possible—it is probable! But are you sure that this Italian is yet living?"

"I have heard nothing one way or the other; but, in the ordinary course of nature, he would live for years yet."

"Yes; and the ordinary course may safely be counted on. The more I think of it, my friend, the more I feel sure that your theory is right. It cannot be difficult to follow up such a clew. This Italian must have been seen and known in New York; the nature of his dealings with Raleigh can be traced. Yes; I feel it will be so! I may even be able to help. In Europe I knew many Italians. Promise that you will tell me whatever news may come, so that we may consult together."

I was glad to give this promise; for even the intuitions of a woman like the Countess Almara, guided and restrained, as they would be, by her masculine sense and judgment, were not to be slighted. I took my leave with the understanding that we were to meet soon again. I afterward bethought myself that I had meant to ask her the nature of her former relations with Raleigh; but that could be done another time. Meanwhile, she shared with him the privacy of my thoughts. She would have been a fit mate for him. She would have been a blessing for any man who could have won her!

IX.

Several weeks passed, and the winter season was drawing near. Raleigh's name had gradually faded out of the newspapers, and his tragedy ceased to be the topic of conversation. The murderer had not been found. The clew had not led to anything. One witness, indeed, affirmed that he had seen Raleigh, and the Italian-looking personage whom I had described, alighting from a horse-car in the vicinity of Washington Square. This was a week or two before the murder, at about nine in the evening; but the information was discredited by the addition that the two had had a little child with them, who was very sleepy, and whom the taller of the two men (Raleigh) had taken up in his arms. Now, no child, sleepy or otherwise, had entered into the speculations of the police. Nevertheless, the information was noted down. "It often happens, sir," observed my particular crony among the detectives—a broad-faced, genial-looking gentleman by the name of Duffield—"that the flimsiest things are the very straws that tell the way of the wind. That baby may hang a man yet."

During this period I was a frequent visitor at the Countess Almara's. The intimate turn given to our friendship by Raleigh's death grew even more marked; I felt myself strengthened and completed by her companionship, and she, on the other hand, seemed to lean more and more on me, and continually revealed to me new treasures of her heart and mind. But no word of love was ever spoken between us. We had no lack of

other topics ; and, while mystery still shrouded Raleigh's fate, we tacitly refrained from any too personal allusions.

One surprise the Countess had in store for me. I found her one day with a little boy between her knees, who was absorbed in watching her make a paper cocked hat. As the child looked up, I recognized my friend, Max, of Central Park. Almara smiled.

"Do you remember me, Max?" I asked.

"Yes, I remember," said Max, in his childish French. "You gave me an apple. But Auntie would not let me go for my portrait."

"And who is Auntie?" I further inquired.

"I will resolve the mystery," said the Countess, laughing. "I am responsible for Max's failure to keep his appointment. I feared—foolishly, perhaps—that to let him go to the studio would seem like an indirect approach on my part. Max is my little nephew," she added, "but I am his papa and mamma as well."

"This is a new page in the romance," I remarked.

"It refers to an earlier page, which I was intending to read to you. Max is associated with my relations with Raleigh. His father died some years after my husband. The child was already motherless, and he had no one but me. But I was then in Paris, and Max was in Poland. I had met Raleigh about that time ; he discovered, somehow, how the case stood—that Max could not get to me, nor I to him—for, in that part of the world, I should have been liable to arrest. Without saying anything to me, he travelled to Poland, found Max, and returned to me with him. That was not all. Just before leaving Paris, I received a draft for a large sum of money ; no name went with it, but I knew it was from him. I wrote, thanking him ; but it was long before an answer came, and then it was cold and evasive ; he declared I

owed him nothing. I have never been able to repay it, and now it is too late; but you will understand why I could not feel at ease to force myself into his presence."

Almara told this story rapidly, passing her hand occasionally over Max's hair, and glancing from him to me and back again. It put Raleigh's character in a fresh light; for, though I had known him to be kind-hearted, I had not supposed him ready to travel several hundred miles to oblige a lady whom he had known so short a time. But two weeks of Almara were equal to a lifetime of any other woman.

I had purposed visiting the White Sulphur Springs during the winter; but I relinquished this project, because the Countess was going to remain in New York, and there could be no holiday for me where she was not. One bright December day I set out for her house in a sleigh and pair, meaning to take her and Max a sleigh-ride in the Park. On my way down University Place, some one on the sidewalk signalled my coachman, who stopped. It was my detective friend, Mr. Duffield, looking radiant.

"I guess it's all right now, sir," said he. "We've got hold of the right end of the string at last, and a good job, too!"

"You don't mean that you've—"

"Nailed the party—that's it!" interrupted Mr. Duffield, in a husky whisper. "You'll hear more to-morrow, if not to-night. Thought I'd give you the tip beforehand, in case you should tumble upon it too sudden. Pleasant drive to you, sir."

My first impulse was to tell this news to Almara. But, on second thoughts, I decided otherwise. I wanted a day of quiet and unsullied enjoyment, and would not

spoil it by the introduction of a subject so painful to both of us. As I drove along, I thought I would smoke a cigarette; but, on examining my case, it was empty. Not quite empty, however; for, on shaking it, out dropped a half-smoked cigarette, which was evidently none of mine. After a moment, I recognized it as the relic which I had taken from the ash-tray on Raleigh's table. It was made of a peculiar paper, ribbed transversely, and stamped with a monogram in gold. "Slighter things have convicted a man," I thought, as I returned it to my case. "I wonder whether Duffield would have found it useful."

Alighting at the Countess's door, I was told that she had gone out, but would return in half an hour. I bade my driver walk his horses for a while, and meantime I went toward Broadway on foot. It still wanted some minutes of the half hour when I came back to the Countess's street. I found myself looking with great earnestness at the back of a gentleman who was preceding me at a distance of about eighty yards. He was dressed in a long gray overcoat, and had on a soft felt hat of the same color, with a black band. I felt certain I had seen the man before, though dressed differently; his gait and the peculiar swing of his arms were terribly unmistakable. He hastened along, his head down, and was now within a few rods of the Countess's door.

A confused noise behind me, accompanied by cries, caused me instinctively to turn my head: a sleigh, drawn by two frightened horses, was coming headlong up the street. There was no driver on the seat, but I saw a person in coachman's attire running at full speed to catch up. I stepped from the sidewalk and succeeded in stopping the team, which I then discovered to be my own. The driver had left them standing at the door of

a liquor saloon, where they had taken fright and bolted. The sleigh had sustained such injuries as to make it unavailable for my projected drive ; so, after scolding the coachman, I sent him back, with the team, to the stable. But, meantime, the man in the gray overcoat had disappeared.

It was with a strange feeling that I rang for the second time at the Countess's door ; but again I resolved to say nothing that might mar our enjoyment of the afternoon. Besides, if Duffield were right in his prognostications, the man I had seen was either not the murderer, or he would be arrested in a few hours. Let the intervening time be peaceful, therefore.

The Countess had returned, and would be down in a few minutes ; but I waited for what seemed a much longer time. At last she entered, apparently in unusual spirits. Her dress was a dark crimson silk, made with an opening at the throat, and it became her well. She took my hand between both of hers.

"This is my birthday," she said. "They have not always been happy days, but this shall be so, because you are here. Sit down on this sofa. Your hand is so cold ! You are not ill, I hope ? Let me feel your pulse —I am an old nurse, remember, and, if you fall sick, I shall come and do for you ! But you ought to be well and happy always ! Ah me !"

"That sigh was not a happy one."

"No ; but I'm an ugly old woman, and these delicious days cannot last forever—not even many weeks longer. Where shall I be on my next birthday ?"

"No farther from me than now, I trust."

"I go to Dresden in January, to—well, to make my living. I am offered a settled income, which I must accept for Max's sake. There will be no birthdays there !

Besides, I dreamt last night that this would be my last birthday of all."

"Do you believe in dreams?"

"In some dreams—very much. You do nothing so irrational?"

"I had a dream I believed in last summer."

"Tell me about it! Was it all a dream?"

"A prophetic vision, perhaps. But I made up my mind not to talk of anything unpleasant to-day."

"Can an interesting thing be unpleasant? A prophetic vision! You must tell me! Then I will give you something I know you like. Prophetic of what?"

"It was two days before Raleigh's death. I dreamt I was present at the whole scene—saw the man and all—up to just before the deed was done. Then I awoke."

Almara had turned pale and relinquished my hand.

"The man, did you say?" she asked, in a low tone. "But you did not see the deed? How can you tell it was to be a murder?"

"I saw the razor in the man's pocket, and the purpose in his mind. He was the one I met the day before in the street. I saw him tear up some letters and pretend to ask forgiveness; and, on the Monday afterward, I found scraps of letters on the floor, and Raleigh's handwriting on them. The coincidences were all strange. But nothing has come of them. Why did you ask me? You are superstitious, and I've startled you!"

She gazed fixedly at me for a long time; I will not interpret the expression on her face. At length she said, in a guarded tone, "Why did you not tell me before?"

"Really, I don't know. There might be nothing in it. But I hate the subject. Let us drop it."

She arose and walked about the room, finally pausing before me.

"I am more used to dreams than you are," she said. "They mean something—but some parts will be false. I believe a part of your dream. Well, let us forget it for the present, and remember it is my birthday—my last! Ah! living is hard work! Why have I kept it up so long?"

"Would nothing reconcile you to living longer?"

She sat down again beside me.

"Yes, if the world could stand still. I can live a great deal in a little while. I would not exchange a day of those sweet moments for a century without them."

"You have been loved very much, Almara."

She glanced at me between the lids of her eyes, and said, slowly:

"No; I have not been loved. Love—why did you speak that word?" she went on with increasing rapidity. "It is the word of life and death! No; I have never been loved—I have never been happy! I have been admired—respected, liked, cared for—not loved! Men found I had a mind; that so amazed them that they stopped. Had they gone farther, they would have been amazed, indeed, for they would have found a heart! But a woman with a face like mine—if she be allowed a heart, it may be friendly, motherly, sisterly—but not passion, fire, love! My ugliness has masked my heart; and yet I have seen something worse—the beauty of an angel masking no heart at all! The path that leads to me is a rough one, but the traveller who reaches me shall be warmed and fed. No. I have not been loved; but I have loved—and I have been hated! Had he only disliked me, I would have killed myself, but, as it was—as it was— Why do you look at me so? Do I frighten you?"

She broke off, laughing.

But she had kindled in me a fervor stronger than the fervor of youth. She had fully revealed how great a woman she was. Her words were but words; but to say them as she did, with her gestures, tones, language of eye and hand—to do that was in the power of no woman besides Almara herself. And her expanding made me great; her revelation of herself revealed to me also the truth that there was something in me to match her.

I took her hand and kissed it. She withdrew it after a moment and laid it against her cheek.

"You do not know what you have done," she said.

"We both know," I answered, gravely. "I did not mean to speak till to-morrow."

"I am content; to-morrow may never come. But it is my birthday! Let us be children—and naughty children, too! I promised just now to give you something."

She took from her pocket a small enamelled case, on the back of which was written in diamonds the name "Almara." It was filled with cigarettes, which exhaled a delicate aroma. She held them toward me with a smile. When I had taken one, she did the same.

"These are very good," I remarked.

"They were made especially for me. I taste no other tobacco."

"I have wondered you never smoked. All Poles do."

"I am not a Pole."

"French, then, or Spanish? You might be anything except English."

"I am a Roman."

"Roman!"

She nodded, breathing the smoke through her nostrils.

"There was no family nobler or more ancient than mine. My sister—she was not like me—she was the loveliest girl in Rome. A young American fell in love

with her, and honored me with his confidence. Ah me! It was long ago!"

"Who was he?"

"A handsome fellow; his name . . . I have forgotten it. He was an artist. You may conceive that my family was not anxious to marry their daughter to a poor American artist! I told him so, but he thought he could do everything. She loved him, too."

"How did it end?"

"Oh, somehow! Let me talk; I like to romance once in a while, and imagine what might have been. Suppose, for instance, that I myself loved this young American, who so coolly used me as go-between, as if I were not made of flesh and blood! That would be a complication! Then—let me see! Then there must be a rival for my sister's hand—a wealthy Roman, who would have the family on his side. I, being jealous, would naturally wish to separate my sister and her American, and would scheme to play a double part between them and the rival. Truly, I think instead of a musician, I should have been a novelist! Do you wish to hear more?"

"Go on."

"Well—but improvising is not so easy! Well, then, I would pretend to assist them in a secret marriage; but I would put the rival, with friends to help him, on his guard. Then I innocently lead my two lovers into the trap—all because I myself loved the American. You must imagine the rest for yourself."

"You married the American?"

"Married him? No—not quite! But I might go on loving him, until, having partly recovered from his disappointment, and believing all the time that I had been sincere in my co-operation to effect their union—some

day he would come to love me; not much, but pretty well; as well as such men as he can love such women as I; well, enough to break my heart, when, at last, I told him (as I would) that I had loved him from the first, and that through me the girl he had loved had died in a convent."

"And the rival—what of him?"

"No matter for him! He dies in a duel or brawl, like the fool he is."

I wish I could describe Almara as she told this tale. She reclined on the cushions of the sofa, one arm over her head, while the other played with the gold chain round her neck. Her face had a careless, and, at the same time, deep and intense expression, strange to behold; her eyes burned and yet laughed. In courage and quality she was like some empress of antique Rome.

Some smoke drifted into my face. Almara waved it away with her handkerchief. I took the handkerchief from her and pressed it to my lips. It had a sweet but rather enervating perfume, which I indistinctly remembered. It was of delicate cambric, with a monogram in one corner.

A silence fell between us. It was broken by the entrance of little Max. He was astride a stick, and wore on his head a gray felt hat, much too large for him. Abandoning his steed, he climbed on a chair behind the Countess, and put the hat on her head. It well became her short black hair and dark features, to which it imparted a somewhat masculine appearance. It had a broad black band round it.

Almara, preoccupied at first, had hardly noticed the boy, or what he was doing. But now, putting up her hand and feeling the hat, she snatched it off, and turned on Max angrily.